

**Body/sexuality/control: female identity
in four Fay Weldon novels**

By

Robyn Gaye Alexander

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
of the degree of Master of Arts

University of Cape Town

1995

The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.

Abstract

This thesis explores the manner in which female identity is depicted and the concept itself deployed in four novels by Fay Weldon (1931-), a contemporary English writer. The novels examined are *Puffball* (1980), *The President's Child* (1982), *The Cloning of Joanna May* (1989) and *Growing Rich* (1992). The thesis's theoretical focus is feminist, and it makes use of terms, arguments and insights provided by contemporary feminist literary and cultural theory. It thus in part also explores the usefulness of insights provided by recent feminist poststructuralist theory, with particular reference to psychoanalytic theory. On the whole, these insights are found to be useful, even though they do not entirely answer some of the questions generated by the possibilities which are shown to exist for female subjects within western culture. The thesis's conclusion suggests ways in which this lack of definitive answers might in its turn be interpreted.

The first chapter, dealing with *Puffball*, examines the novel's depiction of the effects of pregnancy on a woman's body and in turn on her sense of her own identity. This is followed by a chapter on *The Cloning of Joanna May*, which also takes female experience of the maternal as its central focus. This chapter shows how Weldon investigates current meanings of birth, children, identity and the natural via a plot concerned with the uses and abuses of contemporary reproductive technologies. A short chapter on Weldon's prose style, which is seen to manipulate aspects of form in order to generate particular effects, follows. In it, the current reception of Weldon's work and her use of humour in her writing is commented upon. This chapter also anticipates the question of the use of narrative voice, which is crucial to the novels dealt with in the final two chapters. In the first of these, which explores *Growing Rich*, the manner in which masculine power is shown to impact on the bodies of the two central female characters is central. Like the final chapter on *The President's Child*, this chapter also deals with the narrator's use of narrative as vehicle for both the stories of the female characters which she relates and for her own story. The final chapter focuses on the increasingly open conflict which Weldon depicts between male and female power, and also explores how the public/private division central to western culture is disrupted in this novel.

Throughout the thesis, an attempt is made to show how female identity is at present constructed for and by western women: via their own and others' representations of their bodies and their sexuality, and as a concept over which they have varying degrees of control. It concludes that the often contradictory fictional representations of female subjectivity in the four novels under discussion suggest the constraints and difficulties involved in attempts to create new visions of female bodies, sexualities and identities. However, these depictions of such experiences are in addition shown to suggest the possibility of new and different representations.

Dedication

For my mother, who gave me my first Fay Weldon novel, and for Christopher, who entered my life as a consequence of my decision to write this thesis.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr Lesley Marx for all her care and encouragement during work on this thesis. Many thanks to my parents Ian and Gill, and my brother Evan, for their continual support and love, and to Ingrid for her advice and understanding.

The financial support of the Centre for Science Development (HSRC, South Africa) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the Centre for Science Development.

The financial support of the University of Cape Town is also gratefully acknowledged. Opinions expressed are not necessarily to be attributed to the University.

Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. <i>Puffball</i> : pregnancy, nature, identity	12
3. <i>The Cloning of Joanna May</i> : reproductive technologies, motherhood, identity	41
4. A note on Weldon's style, the female voice, and <i>écriture féminine</i>	73
5. <i>Growing Rich</i> : body, narrative, identity	87
6. <i>The President's Child</i> : body, child, control	118
7. Conclusion	150
8. Bibliography	154

Introduction

"...taking, as it were, the feminist route: no other, or so I always felt, being open to me" (Weldon, 1994b, 188).

"I am a woman. I write with who I am" (Irigaray, 1993b, 53).

My epigraphs apply both to this thesis's subject and to its author. In exploring the various ways in which Fay Weldon presents and engages with the contemporary problem of female identity in four of her novels, my most constant point of reference has been the feminism which she feels has been her only option. It is not necessarily the only option available, in theoretical terms, when producing a study of her writing. However, in this thesis, I do indeed take on a particular variety of feminist theory in order to examine Weldon's work. In it, the work of feminist poststructuralist theorists is central; however, I have not confined myself to the insights provided by their work, but have tried to make use of several varieties and aspects of feminist theory in general.

Many feminist theorists have influenced my readings of Weldon. Invaluable guidance and clarification have been provided by Luce Irigaray, Jane Gallop, Julia Kristeva, Drucilla Cornell, Jacqueline Rose, Shoshana Felman and Meaghan Morris. It will also be noted by any reader of my bibliography that the work of Irigaray, the (feminist) philosopher and psychoanalyst, has been extremely important to the production of this thesis. Key concepts from this work have enabled me to explain some of the most disturbing and ambivalent parts of Weldon's work in potentially useful ways.¹ Particularly important to this thesis, as indicated by its title, is the

¹ The charge most frequently levelled at Irigaray, which might thus also be levelled at this thesis, is that of essentialism. However, Irigaray's purpose is more accurately stated as an attempt "to displace male models, rather than to accurately reflect what female sexuality *really* is" (Grosz, 1989, 117, emphasis in original). She

manner in which Weldon's novels deploy and portray female identity. What I have attempted to do with this concept is not, however, to discover and posit some form of whole, authentic and new identity for female subjects in Weldon's novels. Rather, I attempt to explore these identities from a perspective which takes into account both the contingent status of identity and the need to recognise that a perspective advocating total liberation from the concept itself can only lead to "paralysis -- the oceanic passivity of undifferentiation" (Gallop, 1982, xii). As a concept, identity must be assumed and recognised, then critically examined. What kinds of identity are being created in these texts by and for women? What dilemmas regarding the establishment of female identity are present, worked through, or implicitly problematic? What might the solutions be to the dilemmas discovered? These are the kinds of questions regarding the notion of female identity which are asked during the course of this thesis, questions which it is not always possible to answer definitively.

I have also found some resemblances between the views and projects of Weldon and Irigaray. Both, for example, are suspicious of slavish ideological affiliation, and wary of the term "feminist". As early as 1985, for example, Weldon was stating

I am a feminist, but I would not describe myself as a feminist novelist because that would imply that the novels were written because I was a feminist. I am a feminist and I write novels, and because I believe feminism to be a true view of the world what I write is bound to come out to be feminist. You could advance the view that all good writing is bound to be feminist... it depends on how you're going to define feminist (1985a, 313).

does not "argue that biology is destiny," but chooses, via her argument that feminine difference is continually suppressed within western culture, to explore "the effects that various representations of Woman, the feminine, and female bodies have had on and in the destinies of women" (Morris, 1988, 47).

Weldon's view of how flexible and changeable the term "feminism" is is here emphasised, as is her refusal to be simply defined -- and thus dismissed? -- as a "feminist novelist". This seems to be the result of her insight into the uses and abuses of the term "feminism", of which she becomes increasingly wary as the eighties progress. In this she is quite close to Irigaray, who refuses to be described as a feminist at all, because, while she supports many aspects of the struggles of women in practice, she argues that the term is theoretically inadequate. In other words, it does not describe or imply the manner and extent of changes actually needed in western culture before the issue of sexual difference can be fruitfully resolved. Similarly, according to Regina Barreca, "Weldon insists that the possibilities for overturning the system lie not in political revolutions but in revising the entire system of power and construction" (1994c, 182). I deal at some length with Weldon's prose style -- and manipulation of form -- in a forthcoming chapter, but it should also be noted here that this style does bear some resemblance to Irigaray's. Commenting on Irigaray's use of form and style in their "Translators' Note" to *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1993a), Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill state that

because typography and format are such significant aspects of the Irigarayan text, we have sought not to standardize idiosyncratic usage but rather to respect her deliberate deviation from editorial norms wherever possible. Thus, ... extra spacing is often used to mark pauses for reflection, stages in the unfolding of the argument, or parallelisms in the marshalling of arguments in support of a thesis (viii).

This, as will become clear once her style is more fully explored, bears a marked resemblance to aspects of style and form utilized by Weldon in her novels.

Weldon is a prolific writer who has produced an enormous amount of work in the almost thirty years since her first novel, *The Fat Woman's Joke* (1967) was published. During this period, she has written twenty-one novels, three collections of

short stories, three works of non- or metafiction, two children's books, and numerous stage plays, screenplays, radio plays, and adaptations of both her own and the work of other writers for radio and screen (film and television). She has also written many magazine, newspaper and journal articles. In spite of this -- or, at this point, perhaps because of the sheer volume of this body of work -- no full-length published study of Weldon's work exists. Rare journal articles, a book of essays (Barreca, 1994), chapters in critical studies of contemporary women's writing, unpublished theses, and interviews and reviews thus constitute the bulk of critical material available on Weldon. This dearth of critical material is one of the main reasons for the presence in this thesis of its third, short chapter on Weldon's style. This chapter is, in my opinion, not suitable as an introduction to the thesis as a whole, since it deals with issues which arise in part from the progress of its arguments in the first two chapters, and anticipates such progress in the last two.² As I have suggested, it also emerges from the lack of secondary material on Weldon's novels. Dealing with many other -- even contemporary -- writers is a different kind of task: in such a case, the theoretical and critical paradigms are largely already defined. In the case of a study of Weldon, I discovered that I had to create such paradigms myself.³ Rather than presenting these as a set of definitions at the start of the thesis, however, I think that the placement of the chapter enables the reader to reflect on its ideas as they impact and reflect on what has gone before, and anticipate in turn the chapters still to be presented.

² This also reflects the chronology of the process of writing of the thesis, which I would prefer to leave intact rather than to adjust after the fact. The development of its approach is thereby emphasised, rather than wilfully obscured.

³ Indeed, this seems likely to be one of the reasons for my choice of Weldon as object of study in the first place.

Weldon's biography is, according to several commentators, as varied and variable as the lives of her fictional heroines. As Barreca notes, "[i]t is more than difficult to document Fay Weldon's life story because she reinvents herself biographically nearly as often as any set of questions can be posed" (1994b, 6). Even her date of birth seems uncertain: I have seen dates of 1931, 1932 and 1933 during my research for this thesis. It seems fairly certain, however, that Weldon was born Franklin Birkinshaw in Alvechurch, Worcestershire. Her father was a doctor and her mother a writer, and they were divorced when Weldon was a small child. As a result, she grew up in a household which consisted of herself, her sister, her mother, and her grandmother, in New Zealand (during the second world war) and then in London. Immediately after completing a degree in Economics and Psychology at St Andrews University in Scotland, Weldon became pregnant with her first son. Some critics assert that she was married to her child's father (said to be much older than her), albeit for quite a short time. In other versions of Weldon's story, she did not marry him. During this period, Weldon worked as, among other things, an advertising copywriter. In 1960, she married Ronald Weldon, an antique dealer, and subsequently had three more sons. In 1976, they moved out of London to Somerset, near Glastonbury Tor, the setting for the first novel under discussion in this thesis, *Puffball* (1980). Late in 1993, the Weldons were divorced, and she has, apparently, recently remarried. 1995 sees the publication of her twenty-first novel, *Splitting* (London: Flamingo).

As this variable and eventful biography in part suggests, Weldon is very much in favour of alteration and change. In a recent article on makeovers in *Allure* magazine, for example, she says that "[a]ll the best transformations are

accompanied by pain: that's the point of them. And look, I'm not saying it isn't worth it" (1994a, 58). Even more positively, she adds, "[t]here is no virtue in acceptance -- a virtue drummed into young girls by their (mostly male) elders and betters.

Transform, and good luck to you" (1994a, 60). Weldon is also quite happy publicly to change her mind about positions for which she has in some cases been regarded as a kind of spokeswoman. A recent and controversial example is her "revision" of her point in *The Fat Woman's Joke* (1967). Weldon now announces that in that novel, she said, "more or less, fat means good -- natural, friendly, a resistance to male mind control -- and thin means bad" (1995b, 67). She follows this summary with the unashamed statement: "[w]ell, I've recanted. I know better now" (1995b, 67).⁴

Many readers -- and critics -- find Weldon's writing "difficult", perhaps because it treats them "roughly on occasion, expecting a great deal from them and assuming an intimacy that some neophytes find daunting" (Barreca, 1994b, 5). As Rachel Brownstein says, "Weldon is a writer who likes to buttonhole a reader" (1994, 59). Many are even more offended by Weldon's refusal to make clear the distinctions between truth and fiction in her writing. They may also dislike her didactic narrators, particularly when these narrators make factual mistakes. Finally, in the case of some feminist critics, there may be a dislike of particular aspects of her fictional portrayal of women.

For example, with regard to Weldon's depiction of the relationships between

⁴ As Siân Mile suggests regarding Weldon, "[f]eminist' best articulates, then, the politics of Fay Weldon and her texts; 'punk' best articulates the style of her personae and her writing" (1994, 23). Mile is attempting to find a label for the constantly altering qualities of Weldon's "personae", both in her writing and her public life, and chooses "punk" because of the manner in which Weldon "reinvents her own identity, rejects the value of expertise, rejects the notion of an ideology, and, lastly, refuses her audience the respect they 'deserve'" (1994, 25).

women, particularly in terms of the radical feminist concept of "sisterhood", Lorna

Sage says that Weldon is

herself a traitor to certain kinds of literary sisterhood, especially women writers in the matriarchal mould. On the one hand her plots are invariably partisan and have female characters centre-stage...; and on the other she refuses to see women as experts in continuity and communion (1992, 154).

While this is arguably a valid point, the prescriptivist tone, which implies that Weldon *should* be showing women to be "experts in continuity and communion", is one which I have tried in this thesis to avoid. Weldon does indeed dwell on some of the problems involved with relationships between women in her novels. Nonetheless, she is interested in them, recently asserting that "[w]e are a sisterhood. On the phone to one another all hours of the day and night. Do you know what he did?... How can he behave like that?" (1994a, 59-60). The concept of sisterhood figures largely in the novels on which this thesis focuses. However, rather than attempting to show what Weldon *should* be doing, or "defending" her by arguing that her vision is the more "true" and accurate one, I have in this thesis tried to explore how concepts such as "sisterhood" are used, when and why they are brought into play in the various texts, and what the results of this deployment are.

Gallop notes the presence of a phenomenon similar to the abovementioned impulse to "defend" Weldon's vision as accurate and "true" in some feminist criticism of the late seventies. She notes that

at the more contentious edges of the mainstream, feminist critics... establish that a certain woman writer relegated to 'popular' status is in fact an artist. ... [T]his activity allows the feminist critic to avoid contradiction between her feminism and her belief in literature. Avoiding this contradiction leaves intact a central piece of the ideology of the literary academy, the belief that the artist is not only a craftswoman but wise, a superior human being (1992, 134).

I do not in this thesis attempt to make the point that Weldon is a "wise" and "superior"

human being, or that her writing is "great literature" and therefore worthy of study. I am, rather, primarily interested in exploring how the problem of female identity and experience is re-presented within her writing. This kind of project is, in my opinion, hindered rather than helped by a critical viewpoint which attempts to see Weldon as a great artist and thus as capable of finding coherent and cohesive solutions to the ideas and issues with which her writing deals.

The first chapter explores the novel of which Weldon has recently stated that "[a]sked what the favourite of my novels is, I always say *Puffball*, without even thinking" (1994c, 206). I have examined *Puffball* from the perspective of the manner in which the novel deals with the effect of a pregnancy on a woman's body and her sense of her own identity. The novel explores the maternal from the point of view of the mother herself, rather than from the perspective of the (male or female) child. In it, the "traps" of essentialism and a simplistic overvaluation of the natural -- in terms of the binary opposition of nature and culture -- loom large. However, as I show, *Puffball* does not definitively decide on either the natural or the cultural as an answer to the inadequacy of patriarchal definitions of the feminine. In this novel, "the writing of the maternal remains important for its refusal of the devaluation of the feminine upon which gender hierarchy rests" (Cornell, 1991, 8-9). However, a new hierarchy is not created. Rather, the experiences of Liffey, *Puffball's* chief protagonist, express and re-produce in a particular manner the dilemmas encountered by any attempt at feminist re-vision of the maternal.

Both *Puffball* and the novel next dealt with in this thesis, *The Cloning of Joanna May* (1989), take female experiences of the maternal as their subject matter. What the latter novel in part suggests is that "[i]f birthing is not to become

traumatizing and pathological, the question of having or not having children should always be raised in the context of another birthing, a creation of images and symbols" (Irigaray, 1993c, 18). Here, Weldon continues the exploration of "how the mother-subject represents her body to herself" (Kaplan, 1992, 15), investigating the meanings of birth, children, and -- crucially -- the natural, in terms of a plot involving the use of particular kinds of reproductive technology. Weldon says that "[i]n *The Cloning of Joanna May* I take birth away from women, and hand it over to men: as they are of course busy doing for themselves in the real world" (1994c, 206). This is a typically glib, "throwaway" assessment of her novel, however, in spite of the clue it offers regarding Weldon's political views on the subject of reproductive technologies. As the chapter attempts to show, *The Cloning of Joanna May* re-presents concepts of motherhood, identity, and sisterhood in subversive and illuminating ways.

Ideas and questions raised in the first two chapters, particularly with regard to Weldon's manipulation of form and use of style, form the basis of the short third chapter. It is entitled "A note on Weldon's style, the "female voice", and *écriture féminine*", and also anticipates some aspects of the use of narrative voices in the last two chapters. Finally, this chapter also explores in part Weldon's status as "popular" and "humorous" novelist and writer, so as to explain some possible reactions to her work.

The fourth chapter of this thesis is concerned with the representations of female bodies in one of Weldon's most recent novels, *Growing Rich* (1992). In it, I explore the manner in which the power of a male world is shown to impact on the bodies of two of the female characters in particular, those of the narrator and the heroine of the story this narrator tells. Defining the "body", Gallop describes it as

made up of the “perceivable givens that the human being knows as ‘hers’ without knowing their significance to her” (1988, 13). In *Growing Rich*, this descriptive combination of closeness and opacity accurately conveys the kind of bodily experience which women have, particularly because these experiences are exaggerated or “unreal” in some way. The narrator, for example, is paralysed, while the chief protagonist of the story she tells has a body which undergoes almost constant alteration in its outward, physical characteristics. The novel has a particularly ambiguous and problematic ending, in ways for which I attempt to account in the chapter, and thus opens up the theoretical question of whether “any possible theory of sexuality [is] doomed to failure because desire must exceed and frustrate logical consistency?” (Gallop, 1988, 81).

The concern behind *The President's Child* (1982), subject of the final chapter of this thesis, is to expose the “danger that the moral panic arising from a fear of the disruption of the idealized nuclear family will only serve to increase the power of men in the family” (Smart, 1987, 99). In conveying a story of male and female power in increasingly open conflict, with a contemporary perspective, this novel is shown to disrupt the conventional division between the public and the private spheres of western culture. The chapter also deals at length with the narrator’s use of a story as a narrative vehicle for both the story she is “telling” and that which simultaneously speaks of her own problematic experiences of femininity.

Many of the issues explored in this thesis with regard to Weldon’s writing are not completely resolved in it. I would therefore like to end this introduction, and begin this thesis, by quoting from Elizabeth Grosz. She is describing Irigaray’s project but, as I will be showing during the course of this thesis, could just as well be

describing Weldon's:

Her challenge revolves around two central themes: that of the cultural debt to maternity, the creation of a means of representing the mother's relations to the child beyond the orbit of the symbolic father's authority; and that of adequately representing and constructing an autonomously conceived female sexuality, corporeality and morphology. Each requires more than a reorganisation and equalisation of socialisation and child-rearing practices (as feminists like Chodorow, Dinnerstein et al proclaim); they imply a profound and difficult reorganisation of the forms and means of representation -- a reorganisation of language itself (1989, 109).

The resolution of these issues is obviously a project beyond the scope of this thesis.

However, they are the particular aspects of female bodily experiences which are explored in Weldon's novels. As I argue, these experiences are shown to influence the manner in which contemporary western women are able to conceive of their bodies. In turn, their sexuality, and the control (or, frequently, the lack thereof) which they are able to exert over their identities, is analysed and explored.

***Puffball*: pregnancy, nature, identity**

"Pregnancy is the most natural state imaginable..." (Coward, 1992, 49).

"Those interested in what maternity is for a woman will no doubt be able to shed new light on this obscure topic by listening, with greater attentiveness than in the past, to what today's mothers have to say not only about their economic difficulties but also, and despite the legacy of guilt left by overly existentialist approaches to feminism, about malaise, insomnia, joy, rage, desire, suffering, and happiness" (Kristeva, 1985, 113).

In her review of *Puffball* in the *Times Literary Supplement*, Anita Brookner describes the novel as "in favour of the old myths of earth motherhood and universal harmony" (Brookner, 1980, 202). Fay Weldon had recently moved from London to the country, very close to the situation of Liffey's fictional cottage, in the shadow of Glastonbury Tor. She had also given birth to her fourth son. It might indeed have seemed, at the time, as if Weldon had had a change of heart, or womb, or world view. *Puffball*, as Brookner recognised, speaks with a voice somehow different from that of Weldon's earlier work, even the recent and highly successful *Praxis* (1978). Is this novel the first of Weldon's moves "away" from her earlier feminism? She has said "I wanted to nail down what it feels like to be pregnant. And writing a novel is a similar creative process" (Weldon, quoted in Kenyon, 1988, 119).¹

Puffball certainly does document a pregnancy. But it is also a novel which defies simple explanation, particularly in terms of its supposed support of a "return"

¹ Weldon's use of this metaphoric equation of the processes of writing and pregnancy is noteworthy: as Susan Stanford Friedman asserts, "the childbirth metaphor that reinforces the separation of creation and procreation in a male text becomes its own opposite in a female text. Instead of contributing to the reification of Western culture, the female metaphor expresses a fundamental rebellion against it" (1988, 58).

to a valorization of motherhood which contemporary feminism is "credited" with damaging. This "difficulty", clearly expressed by Brookner's original review of the novel, even surprises its author, who five years after its publication says that "*Puffball* now seems to me a very complex book, far more complex than when I wrote it, a pattern of opposites and contradictions and polarizations" (Weldon, 1985a, 307). The place to begin looking at *Puffball* is at the intersection between its examination of pregnancy and, crucially, related discussions of "nature". I will also be dealing with the interaction between these issues and the supposed denigration of motherhood by feminism.²

At the start of *Puffball*, the omniscient, third person "Weldonesque" narrator makes it clear to the reader that Liffey, the novel's heroine, is naïve, even unthinking. She "believed that she was perfectly happy and perfectly ordinary...saw smooth green lawns where others saw long tangled grass, and was not looking out for snares" (*Puffball*, hereafter *P*, 7). She thinks of herself as only what the narrator calls "outer Liffey, arrived at twenty-eight with boyish body and tiny breasts, with a love of bright, striped football sweaters and tight jeans, and a determination to be positive and happy" (*P*, 13). Encouraged to do so by Richard, her husband of seven years, Liffey keeps her body in check, and exhibits the same relationship with it as many contemporary women do. As Emily Martin puts it in her study of contemporary English women's ways of speaking about their bodies, *The Woman in the Body*, "the

² This question has, as Cora Kaplan remarks, "long been a loaded [one] for feminist theorists, dividing essentialists from antiessentialists in the seventies and eighties," and I will in this chapter also agree with her further comment that "there are more recent indications that these divisions, so crucial at one point for theorists, no longer quite apply" (1994, 153).

central image women use is the following: *Your self is separate from your body*" (1987, 77, emphasis in original). *Puffball* sets out to talk about the way in which Liffey cannot be separated from her body, even if she wishes it. The reader, as well as Liffey herself, has to experience "inner Liffey, cosmic Liffey, hormones buzzing; heart beating, blood surging, pawn in nature's game" (*P*, 13).

There is another, related way in which this apparent dichotomy of the "self" and the "body" of Liffey can be read. The elements of this "dichotomy" together constitute Liffey's identity, and "the question of identity -- how it is constructed and maintained -- is...the central issue through which psychoanalysis enters the political field" (Rose, 1986, 5). Thus "outer Liffey" can be read as Liffey's conscious mind, and "inner Liffey, cosmic Liffey" (*P*, 13) corresponds with her unconscious. These concepts are useful immediately because they disrupt the dichotomy between self and natural self which can be initially read onto the novel.³ In other words, using the concept of the unconscious with regard to *Puffball* means that what Liffey has to come to terms with is no longer some kind of preordained and natural femininity, but her own unconscious desires, and the dramatic lack of control which she has over them.

These moments occur at the start of the novel. In the first chapter, "In the Beginning", Liffey and Richard discover Honeycomb Cottage, and the reader is also introduced to their neighbours-to-be, Mabs and Tucker. These two are the novel's

³ Brookner's review of *Puffball*, from which I have already quoted, and Alan Wilde's comments on the novel in a recent essay dealing primarily with *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* (1983), are examples of this kind of reading. While Brookner sees the triumph of the natural, Wilde praises the "coolly distant objectivity" (1988, 410) of *Puffball's* "scientific discourse". They are, in effect, the same reading -- but I will return to this point later.

chief "country people", since "Tucker's family had lived at Cadbury Farm, or on its site, for a thousand years or so" (P, 9). They are much more obviously part of a culture which believes in the power of nature, as well as in the close relationship between women and nature. Mabs is described in terms of her fertility and her lush femininity: she has "bulk" (P, 11), and is "formless and shapeless" (P, 12). She is also, as the narrator emphasises, "tall and strong and powerful, and her skin [is] creamy white" (P, 12). Mabs has "a reputation of being a witch" (P, 13), one who can exploit the power of nature for her own purposes. Tucker is frequently frightened into silence by his wife's behaviour, but loves "the way her sharp brown eyes, in the act of love, turned soft and docile, large irised, like those of cows" (P, 11). The natural can thus be seen to be the source of both power and weakness in women. Mabs' apparently close connection with the natural makes her husband fear her, but he knows that her sexual desire -- also described in terms of nature -- makes her more docile and controllable.

At the end of the chapter, the reader is told that Mabs "smiled at the hill [Glastonbury Tor] as if it were a friend, and made Tucker still more uneasy" (P, 13). The presence of the Tor as landmark, described as "that hummocky hill which is a nexus of spiritual power, attracting UFOs, and tourists, and pop festivals, and hippies, and the drug squad" (P, 8), has already been remarked on by the narrator, not, as the mention of the drug squad makes clear, without the presence of a subtle but crucial joke. *Puffball's* narrator spends much of the novel describing nature as a real force in the lives of its characters, and simultaneously mocks those who believe in such a force; thus, the use of the drug squad to signify the chemical artificiality of human dealings with nature in the form symbolized by the Tor.

The novel's second section is the first of ten chapters entitled "Inside Liffey" with a number - (1) to (10). It is the first of the major sections which describe Liffey's body and pregnancy in "an inexorable accumulation of physiological detail" (Brookner, 1980, 202). At first, these sections appear to contain a scientific, medical discourse such as might be found in a medical textbook.

[T]he fine hairs of the blastocyst *inside Liffey* had digested and eroded enough of the uterus wall to enable it to burrow snugly into the endometrium and there open up another maternal blood vessel, the better to obtain the oxygen and nutrients it increasingly required (*P*, 121, my emphasis).

However, as my emphasis shows, this is not entirely the case. Crucially, Liffey, as conscious or unconscious subject, (and the latter position is particularly important) is always present in these descriptions of her body. Alan Wilde writes that the descriptions, "in their unsparing, clinical detail, ...give the lie to Liffey's bogus romanticizing of nature" (1988, 410). However, due to the insertion of Liffey herself, -- as subject -- into the descriptions, they cannot be simply read as the "sensible" opposite of the "natural" voice of the novel. The rational and irrational (sense/nature) are less distinct from each other here than Wilde asserts. Besides, Liffey's reliance on the natural, in the form of her baby's "voice" is part of her strength, rather than a weakness, in *Puffball's* terms. Liffey is thus simultaneously the subject of her pregnancy, and, as I will show, subject *to* it.

One of the first such descriptions also forms part of the depiction of Liffey's relationship with her body. "Liffey never enquired of anyone as to why she bled, or what use the bleeding served. She knew vaguely it was to do with having babies" (*P*, 23). The narrator follows this with a careful and extremely detailed description of exactly why and how the menstrual cycle (Liffey's in particular) works. There is

continual emphasis on the agency and subjectivity of the woman's body. Thus, it is "Liffey's pituitary gland" which regulates her cycle, and "Liffey's fallopian tubes" (*P*, 23, my emphasis) in which fertilisation may or may not take place. Liffey's body is also not depicted as helpless, passive, or inactive. It secretes, grows, moves, thickens, degenerates, disintegrates, withdraws, flourishes and disposes of. It is relentlessly active.⁴

Just prior to the conception of their child, in "Inside Liffey (5)", Richard's sperm are described as they "[start] their migration from the vault of Liffey's vagina to the outer part of her fallopian tubes" (*P*, 104). Richard's own hormones, testicles, and fertility problems (he has given up wearing the tight underpants Liffey used to admire) are then described, but entirely within the quite literal frame of Liffey's body. It is only when his sperm are actually inside Liffey that they are dealt with. They are depicted in characteristic ironic and irreverent detail:

Each sperm was about one-twenty-fourth of a millimetre long and consisted of a head, neck and tail. The head of the sperm contained the chromosomes required to fertilise the ovum. The neck contained the mechanism which moved the tail. The tail propelled the sperm forward, at a rate of one millimetre every ten seconds; not bad going for an organism so very small. If it came up against a solid object it would change direction, like a child's mechanical toy (*P*, 105).

Power and control, in terms of the generation of the species, thus comes to be placed within the female body as propelled by nature. But it is not just any female

⁴ Another aspect of these passages is their didactic value. It is clear that Weldon has carefully researched the topic of pregnancy. Having stated that "I think fiction does make minute alterations in people's lives" (Weldon, 1985a, 309), there is, therefore, also a sense in which *Puffball* is a conventional text of 1970s radical feminism, one which aims to educate its reader and "raise her consciousness". Weldon herself has recently commented that "I wrote a novel called *Puffball*, which was a kind of gynaecological textbook as well as a novel" (1994b, 196).

body in *Puffball*, it is Liffey's body. And what, moreover, is this force of "nature"?

Mabs, as I have mentioned already, has an especially close connection with nature in *Puffball*. The novel's plot is, crucially, that of a rivalry -- consciously for Mabs, unconsciously for Liffey -- between the bodies of the two women for a pregnancy, for a (briefly) more privileged relation to nature and the power of nature. Thus Mabs, says the narrator, knows "that there are only so many babies to go round, and that if Liffey was pregnant, she would not be" (*P*, 130). Of course, Liffey is pregnant, though not, as Mabs believes, with Tucker's child, but with Richard's. Mabs spends the rest of *Puffball* trying to rid Liffey's womb of the foetus, doing considerable damage to Liffey (who is only sporadically aware of the hatred Mabs feels for her) to Mabs herself, and, particularly, to Mabs' existing children. Weldon appears here to be rejecting the radical feminist "reappraisal of the lonely old woman curing by her study of herbs" and instead presenting "a malevolent, middle-aged mother, attempting to harm with her herbal potions" (Kenyon, 1988, 120). However, this is not a simple rejection of Mabs' power as derived from her knowledge of the medicinal powers of various plants. Rather, Weldon shows how this power works in ways that are very similar to those of Liffey's (male) doctor. As Weldon says, "the doctor and the witchwoman are dealing in the same substances, the dividing line between medicine and magic is only one of degree" (Weldon, quoted in Kenyon, 1988, 120). Although it is the binary opposition (science versus magic, or culture versus nature) and the choice between them on which the novel originally seems likely to focus, *Puffball* shifts the opposing forces towards each other, showing how both, in the end, make particular -- and similar -- contributions in determining whether or not Liffey's baby survives.

Why is it, though, that Mabs is so very jealous of Liffey's pregnancy? Being pregnant can give a woman a status she has never had, it can be simply or mainly a means to an end -- that of being a mother -- and it can be a state either welcomed or feared. It is a powerful and contradictory experience, and one which is absolutely central to the ways in which women construct their identities, represent themselves, and are represented by others. Some women -- and Mabs is an example -- "experience it so powerfully that it becomes a fascination and a state of supreme importance in its own right" (Coward, 1992, 49). In terms of patriarchal culture, "[t]o become pregnant is to do what is expected of you. It is to be 'in the club' in more ways than one" (Richardson, 1993, 75). In terms of the bodily experience of pregnancy, Mabs' actions show the reader "that pregnancy itself,...is often experienced by women as a very powerful state" (Coward, 1992, 47), shortly before Liffey begins to discover something similar.

Mabs, explains *Puffball's* narrator, is content when pregnant, an ordinary woman.⁵

Mabs, pregnant, felt the fury of her unconscious passions allayed, and could be almost happy. And so, pregnant, became ordinary, like anyone else, and used her hands to cook, and clean, and sew, and soothe, and not as psychic conductors (*P*, 130).

The shift from the woman who exemplifies self-sacrificing motherhood (cooking, cleaning, sewing, soothing) to the one who uses her hands for her own (albeit confused and angry) ends is absolutely clear. Mabs' anger at Liffey's pregnancy is

⁵ The words of "an ordinary woman" in an autobiographical essay on the experience of pregnancy are remarkably similar to the way Mabs feels about being pregnant. Helena Kennedy says that "I feel happy inside my own body when I am pregnant...[e]verything is mellower in pregnancy; maybe I just give myself permission to be less driven" (in Gieve, 1989, 4).

a product of desires and frustrations which are partly unconscious, "surging up in a great wordless storm," but which are also things she "gave no voice to, partly because she scorned to" (*P*, 129). The narrator lists the causes of Mab's anger as

fear of ageing, fear of death, loss of father, fear of mother, hate of sister, resentment of her children (who, once born, were not what she had meant at all), jealousy of Tucker, sexual desire towards other women, pretty women, helpless women; resentment of women who spread their possessions, their homes, delicately around them and stood back in pride: envy of brainy women, stylish women, women who could explain their lives in words...(*P*, 129).

One might argue that Mabs constructs her identity as a woman from within an environment that makes pregnancy "a purpose, an act of self-assertion by a woman forced to assert herself primarily through her biology" (Rich, 1986, 160). However, Mabs' identity is here revealed as having to deal with what is expected of her as woman, and as mother, but also as having other obstacles to happiness.⁶ These include fears of psychic origin and, importantly, those associated with the problematic area of relationships with other women. Might Liffey not be as much desired as hated, in this scenario? She is certainly "pretty" and "helpless", in Mabs' opinion. Even feminism is included in this long list of Mabs' frustrations, for it is none other than the subject of some form of feminist discourse who is able to "explain her life in words". The construction in *Puffball* of Mabs' identity as anything but whole and comprehensible -- particularly to herself -- is a point to which I will return later.

⁶ A very similar dynamic is dramatised in Penelope Mortimer's *The Pumpkin Eater* (Penguin, 1962), in which the protagonist is content only when pregnant, and has a very large brood of children. The actual number of children she has is never revealed to the reader, since it becomes increasingly clear that the children themselves are not important. It is the state and status of pregnancy which is the issue here, rather than its products.

If, therefore, becoming pregnant (and co-opting the power of nature by doing so) means escaping from anger, for Mabs, what does it mean for Liffey? Since Liffey also fears that the father of the foetus is Tucker rather than Richard, she is not particularly happy with the realisation that she is indeed pregnant. She also, says the narrator, "thought that to be pregnant was to be ugly...she thought her life was over" (*P*, 133). Mabs immediately tries to induce an abortion of the foetus by giving Liffey "ergot and tansy tea" (*P*, 137), which Liffey unwittingly pours into a pot plant, thereby killing it. The narrator comments ironically, "had Liffey known this, she might indeed have drunk the tea" (*P*, 138). The following day, however, after running for miles through the countryside, Liffey has her "Annunciation", which takes place in a chapter of the same name.

Initially, it is "Nature" which "speaks" to Liffey, an alien force which tells her she is merely its instrument; "that all things were destined, that she was what she was born, and would never change...and that though she ran and ran she would never escape herself" (*P*, 138). Then, once again, she notices the Tor, and it suddenly seems much less threatening, "it was friendly" (*P*, 138). As already noted with regard to Mabs, the woman establishes that the Tor, symbol of natural power, is her ally in some way. And, as soon as this initial bond is established, Liffey

felt a presence: the touch of a spirit, clear and benign. She opened her eyes, startled, but there was no one there... 'It's me,' said the spirit, said the baby, 'I'm here. I have arrived. You are perfectly all right, and so am I. Don't worry.' The words were spoken in her head: they were graceful, and certain. They charmed. Liffey smiled, and felt herself close and curl, as a sunflower does at night, to protect, to shelter. The words dispersed, and the outside sounds came in. Birdsong, traffic, distant voices (*P*, 138-9).

The baby's voice *is* the voice of the natural, and it is tempting to argue that Liffey

hears the voice of nature in her "annunciation", trusts in what is said by the voice, and goes on to rely on the power of nature for a substantial part of the rest of the novel. In this thesis, she removes herself (even further) from the rational, sensible world and accedes completely to what Brookner, back in the review with which I began, calls "earth motherhood". But this reading does not take notice of some telling details in this moment of annunciation. The "birdsong", described as an "outside sound", means that the voice which Liffey hears may not be simply that of nature. Within nature, perhaps, but nonetheless somehow separated from it. Liffey is described as the protecting shell around the baby, as a "sunflower", but what makes her "close and curl" is, crucially, a voice which she hears "in her head". It is not the voice of a god, speaking from outside of the subject, or the voice of nature, dictating that Liffey should remove herself from the rational. Instead, it is a voice which speaks from within her own head, from the part of her that is rational, identified with thinking rather than with instinct, with the intellect rather than the emotions. At this moment of annunciation, therefore, the very distinction between the sensible (the head) and the natural and instinctual (the earth mother, the sunflower) becomes confused, and is rendered impossible.

This confusion or "impossibility" whereby the natural and the rational become simultaneous for Liffey is emphasised by the fact that she immediately recognises that she cannot tell anyone about what has happened. She cannot express what she has felt or heard because she will either simply not be believed, or be told that she is hallucinating, insane or psychotic in some way. The text sets this out in a characteristically humorous way, by proposing a series of statements to be made about the "annunciation" and following them with isolated question marks or

paragraphs consisting only of the word "no". These practised, never spoken statements about the "annunciation" are also all addressed to different audiences: Richard, Madge (Liffey's mother), Mabs, Richard's parents and finally the two "friends" of Liffey and Richard, Bella and Ray, with whom Richard is staying in London. Each time Liffey imagines speaking to them, she visualises her audience in a way which is less naïve and less trusting than ever before. Her statements are also "wiser" about those to whom she imagines speaking; she describes herself in her imagination to her snobbish parents-in-law as follows:

the flimsy one who trapped your only son into marriage: the never-quite-accepted, never-to-be-accepted one, who tried to charm her way into your hearts but failed, who now says just to have Richard's child isn't enough, but has to have an Annunciation instead, as if Richard was some Middle-Eastern carpenter and she was Mary- (P, 140).

These realisations, in which Liffey is able to recognise how her relationships with others work, are moments of clarity and incipient power for her. For once, she does not see others as she thinks she should see them, but notices quite precisely how she is expected to behave, and how this expected behaviour totally precludes the possibility of expressing to others what has occurred. As I have tried to show, these moments are the product of an experience which is neither purely rational nor wholly instinctual, an experience which calls the actual distinction between these categories into question.

I would suggest, then, that *Puffball*, in its particular way, speaks about the female experience of pregnancy in a manner which does not become caught in the familiar binary opposition of the "natural" and the "rational". It echoes, in this chapter of "Annunciation", the workings of Julia Kristeva's essay "Stabat Mater" (Women's Time) (1985 [1977]), in which her creative expression of her own

experience of pregnancy "spills over" into her academic tracking of the image of the Madonna over historical time. This happens almost literally, in the layout of the text into columns which run down the page next to each other, and also in the starkly contrasting language which Kristeva uses in the two parts. The two sections could be read separately, but they refuse this by the way they are laid out on the page, and by the way they inform each other. Kristeva describes part of her experience as

The smell of milk, dew-drenched greenery, sour and clear, a memory of wind, of air, of seaweed (as if a body lived without waste): it glides under my skin, not stopping at the mouth or nose but caressing my veins, and stripping the skin from my bones fills me like a balloon full of ozone and I plant my feet firmly on the ground to carry him, safe, stable, unuprootable, while he dances in my neck, floats with my hair, looks right and left for a soft shoulder... (1985 [1977], 107).

The sense of absolute security and tranquillity here is repeated in the strength which Liffey derives from the "voice" of her child for the rest of the novel. So later on, for example, when told by Mabs that her doctor has been convicted of indecent assault, "The baby laughed, amused. Liffey heard" (*P*, 167). She is thus not intimidated or worried by what Mabs has told her, and instead is reassured by the "sense" of the "voice" inside her.

The plot of *Puffball* is frequently one of dramatic suspense. Will the baby survive? Will Mabs succeed in her plans to destroy it, and will she continue to attempt to do so even if she no longer believes the child to be Tucker's, since it is this "fact" which she feels justifies her assault on the baby? These questions, thrown up continually by the text, are the major reason for the sense of drama noticed by most of those who have commented on the novel. For example, in "Fay Weldon and the Radicalising of Language", Olga Kenyon enthuses that "never before has the struggle between reason and unreason, triggered by pregnancy,

been so sympathetically and *dramatically* detailed" (1988, 119, emphasis in original). It is the pregnancy which generates or is the central source of the experience of suspense and "drama".⁷ Kenyon here responds on a very conventional level to what Weldon is doing (examining the "struggle between reason and unreason"; two terms which, as I have tried to show, are actually problematised as a binary opposition in the text) but I would argue that the reason it is such an arresting focus is the fact that pregnancy and motherhood are so central to any definition of female identity in patriarchal society. The suspense which *Puffball* generates at the level of the plot is reinforced by the sense of the importance of pregnancy for Liffey (reflected, also, in the obsessive importance attached to it by Mabs).

I would now like to return to the notion of "nature", and what has already been partly explored as a problematising of the distinction between the rational and the irrational (or natural) in *Puffball*. In another of Weldon's statements about the novel, she says that

Puffball is devoted to a proposition I don't necessarily believe in, you see: it's an examination of the degree to which women are victims of their biology, good and bad. The proposition, that is to say, is that a woman has something in her that she has to contend with (1985a, 307).

This verbal comment (in an interview situation) on the novel's meaning is an intriguing – while perhaps necessary, as the kindly "you see" signals – explanation of its content. Firstly, Weldon emphasises exactly what Kenyon spoke of; the

⁷ It might be argued that there are other sources of suspense and excitement in *Puffball*; the problems in Liffey and Richard's marriage, or Richard's various interactions and sexual relationships with the people he deals with in London, and so on. However, the major and central drama in the novel always remains the pregnancy.

"conflict" between women's rational behaviour as human beings, and their "biology". She takes care to insist that the influence of this "biology" can be positive as well as negative, thus adroitly avoiding the possibility of saying that all of nature (and, by implication, all that is connoted feminine) should really be done away with. She then quite unreasonably (since the existing explanation seems perfectly clear) restates it in new terms. This is when the comment becomes particularly interesting, because "their biology" becomes the highly ambiguous "a woman has something in her". What might this "something" be? Why move away from the notion of "biology" as soon as one invokes it? And finally, what might the link between this mysterious, almost uncanny "something" and *Puffball's* own "new" construct, "Zature", be?

The notion of biology, and following this, of nature, is a problematic one in feminist theory. Feminist critics have wanted to show that women are not simply driven by instinct, and they have critically demonstrated that women have always been controlled by patriarchal laws on the grounds of the supposed effects of what has been named as their "biology". The problem is that the feminist critic is trapped within a system of language, and ways of thinking, which are phallogocentric. The identification of the masculine with the phallus, the rational and the intellectual means that the feminine, within language, is always connoted as that which is not rational, that which forms "the underside of language and speech" (Rose, 1991, 27). Broadly speaking, this "underside" has also been named the "semiotic" (by Julia Kristeva), the "Imaginary" (by Jacques Lacan) and "feminine writing" (by Hélène Cixous, Jacques Derrida and others).⁸ The project of these theorists has, broadly

⁸ It is highly simplistic to equate these theorists, and their terms, with one another. I do not mean to imply that they are equivalent terms, but merely to give

speaking, been to try to show how the workings of the "underside" continually inform and even occasionally erupt into correct, conventional language, the discourse of rationality and patriarchy; the phallogocentric order.

But these theorists have been severely criticised for this move.⁹ They have been accused of "essentialism", of "biologism"; in short, of returning women to the very place from which they were trying to escape. The "problem" of biology, and of the identification of women with the "natural" is thus one with which every feminist critic and writer grapples. Weldon is no exception, and it is her feminist affiliation which leads her to abandon so rapidly the notion of biology as soon as she has referred to it. Thus, in the above quotation, she shifts her ideas into the largely undefined "something in her". Part of the origins of such a statement (and of the related concept of "Zature" in *Puffball*) can be found in

the movement in and out of gender as ideological representation, which...characterises the subject of feminism...a movement back and forth between the representation of gender (in its male-centred frame of reference) and what representation leaves out or, more pointedly, makes unrepresentable (De Lauretis, 1987, 26).¹⁰

some examples of contemporary theories of femininity and writing which have been accused of being essentialist and biologicistic.

⁹ As have many feminist critics and theorists, not just those who make use of (French) philosophical and psychoanalytic concepts and insights. See, for example, Toril Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London, MacMillan, 1985), which accuses influential (American) feminist literary theorists such as Kate Millett, Elaine Showalter and Annette Kolodny of much the same "crime".

¹⁰ This problem has been expressed in a number of ways by feminist theorists in the last few years. Another way of describing it is as follows: "The fact that women remain subject to normative representations -- of Woman, the feminine, the biologically female -- reminds us that such representations continue to exert a great deal of pressure on any attempt to represent women as the subjects of feminism, or, indeed, the subjects of any discourse or social practice" (Robinson, 1991, 8).

The chapter or section of *Puffball* entitled "Zature" begins with a further detailed description of the development of Liffey's pregnancy. The detail is, as always, introduced as Liffey's, as occurring inside her, but is particularly "scientific", using highly specialised terminology. The reader is told that

a cystic space appeared in the morula of her pregnancy, which could now be termed a blastocyst. It grew sprout-like projections, termed choriomic villi. It drifted down towards the cavity of the uterus (*P*, 117).

The narrator then states, as the introduction to a discussion of the natural which moves completely away from Liffey's body and experience, that "[s]o each one of us began: Nature sets us in motion, Nature propels us. It is as well to acknowledge it" (*P*, 117-8). But something paradoxical has happened here; in fact, two things have happened.

Firstly, the description of the very young foetus, done in "medical" terminology, is part of a discourse that is largely meaningless to someone who is not a doctor, or at least familiar with these terms. As they stand in this text, therefore, they are mysterious, strange, and unknown. What exactly is a "morula"? Or a "blastocyst"? The terms serve to mystify (rather than clarify) the process being described, and thus do not support their own status as "scientific". Science defines itself as that which speaks clearly, as that which explains biological processes, as the opposite of the "natural", which is irrational and mysterious. Once again, therefore, *Puffball* collapses the distinction between opposites, between the poles of science (or medicine) and nature (or magic/mystery).

If it was initially surprising that the narrator links the highly scientific discourse used to describe the foetus with "Nature", then, it is no longer quite so apparently contradictory. This leads into my second point, which returns this

passage to contradiction. As the narrator collapses the scientific and the natural into one another, "Nature" becomes, once again, that which is all-encompassing and all-powerful. Even science, which so prides itself on being able to conquer the natural and irrational, has simply become part of the irrational. The question immediately generated here returns once again to the "biological" which Weldon immediately replaces with "something in the woman". Why, if Weldon is wanting to show that women are *not* governed by the natural and biological, does she so categorically assert its power here? The answer, I would like to argue, is in the shift which takes place between "Nature" and "Zature".

The chapter goes on to describe "Nature", by which it says

we mean not God, nor anything which has intent, but the chance summation of evolutionary events which, over aeons, have made us what we are... Looking back, we think we perceive a purpose. But the perspective is faulty (P, 118).

"Nature", in other words, is totally purposeless, totally without long term planning, and totally irrational. It is only human reasoning which ascribes purpose -- and vision -- to "Nature" in a teleological way. Thus, says the narrator, we must remember that "Nature" is blind, even while her name "is imbued with a sense of purpose, as the name of God used to be" (P, 118). In an explicitly postmodern move, the narrator then tells the reader that "[w]e cannot turn words back: they mean what we want them to mean; and we are weak" (P, 118). The power to change words, to change the way the world is represented, is given to humans, but they are unable to do so because they are "too weak". What, therefore, the narrator does is try to make a new word, and with it, a new concept. "Too late," she says, to abandon the idea of something purposeful driving humanity forward, controlling in

some way what happens, so all that can be done is to "seize the word, seize the day; lay the N on its side and call our blind mistress Zature" (*P*, 118).

This is a difficult moment, partly because it is hard to grasp exactly what the purpose of the concept of "Zature" might be, and partly because the linguistic move engineered here is (on one level, but perhaps not completely) unsuccessful.¹¹ The purpose of the concept of "Zature" is the same as the reason for Weldon's shift in the interview situation from "biology" to "something in her" (which, like Freud's "uncanny", continually returns to influence the conscious life -- and thus the formation of the identity -- of the woman). What is being attempted here, as I partly explained above, is a move away from that which has always been used as a reason to restrict, control and oppress women: their connection with the natural, their specific "biology". However, it is still necessary to explain why the natural remains attractive to women (is this a rational or an irrational [natural] "necessity"? both? neither?). To put it another way, this is an attempt to explain why "women continue to become Woman, continue to be caught in gender" (De Lauretis, 1987, 10). The paradox which *Puffball* attempts both to express and defeat is that of motherhood itself; that it "is simultaneously women's weakness and women's strength." (Stanworth, 1990, 296).

I have asserted that the invention of the new term and concept of "Zature" is not successful. This is certainly the case on one level, since the term, once

¹¹ This idea -- that changing language cannot guarantee any change in the "real world" -- is also fairly prevalent in contemporary feminist thought. In a nostalgic moment, Nancy K. Miller says that "I sometimes long for the conviction we had then [in the 1960s and 70s] that changing the language counted for something" (1993, 38).

invented, does not seem to differ from the original "Nature" in any way. For example, it is invoked as the biological origin of the quarrel between Bella and Ray (Bella is going through the early stages of menopause, Ray has a lack of testosterone) which immediately follows its insertion into the text, and it is, after the short chapter in which its invention takes place, totally abandoned. However, the chapter does clearly dramatise the extreme difficulty which feminist writers (both creative and critical) experience when trying to reorganise or rearrange the relationship between woman and nature. This is because, although female identity can be seen to have been defined, via "nature", entirely by the "man-father" (Irigaray, 1985a, 95), there is no "outside" of this definition, no small piece of the natural which can be used as a foundation for female identity without the problem of "biologism" and "essentialism" intruding. This is the reason for Weldon's "something in her" and for *Puffball's* "Zature", and the reason why neither can provide a real alternative to "biology" and "Nature".

In more theoretical terms, then, it might be said that "Zature" does remain "Father Nature" -- or, more accurately, "Mother Nature" as *defined by the Law of the Father* -- since there does not seem to be any kind of founding, female alternative on which such a concept and discourse of the natural could be founded. "Zature" might thus be said to be a name for a female nature which does not exist, although the possibility of its existence does exist. What Luce Irigaray has said about female identity also applies to the attempt in *Puffball* to speak about an other nature, that "[t]heoretically there would be no such thing as woman. She would not exist. The best that can be said is that she does *not exist yet*" (1985a, 166). This is not, however, to consign *Puffball's* attempt to redefine the natural to the realm of total

failure. On the contrary, what is exposed in this text are the conditions of (im)possibility of the existence of such a (feminist) concept.

The natural and the feminine are inextricably linked within the symbolising systems of western patriarchy. Thus any attempt to redefine or rearrange notions of female identity must at some point deal with the effects of this "natural order of things" on women's experience, and always runs the risk of simply repeating the definitions that already exist and constrain. As I have shown above, for example, even the most careful reworking of the experience of pregnancy exposes nothing more than the current impossibility of any new definition of the experience of motherhood.¹² This does not, however, mean that the realm of the natural should be abandoned. As Irigaray recently put it, "to deny all explanations of a biological kind -- because biology has paradoxically been used to exploit women -- is to deny the key to interpreting this exploitation" (1993b, 46). The extremely difficult network of relationships between feminism, ordinary women,¹³ and pregnancy and motherhood is an area in which the problem of female experience of the natural and biological is clearly highlighted. This is to return, then, to the second epigraph to this chapter,

¹² Drucilla Cornell's proposal for the resolution of this problem of symbolisation is as follows: "[r]ather than a call for a female symbolic to counter the operation of the masculine imaginary, I would argue that we need to challenge the rigid divide between the imaginary and the symbolic. It is this divide which makes the feminine imaginary, by definition, completely inexpressible" (1991, 78). This is a more formal and theoretical way of explaining the dilemma expressed by the portrayal of nature, and the feminine, in *Puffball*.

¹³ The terms "feminism" and "ordinary women" as I am using them here are probably largely meaningless, since there can be no such thing as either one single, universally defined "feminism", nor such a being as an exemplary "ordinary woman". However, these are the terms of the debate which I am now entering, and thus it is necessary that they be used.

and the charge that feminism -- or at least, "overly existentialist approaches to feminism" (Kristeva, 1985, 113) -- has denigrated and rejected the experience of motherhood for women. Here, for example, is a passage from Kristeva's essay "Stabat Mater":

To begin with, we live in a civilization in which the *consecrated* (religious or secular) representation of femininity is subsumed under maternity. Under close examination, however, this maternity turns out to be an adult (male and female) fantasy of a lost continent: what is involved, moreover, is not so much an idealized primitive mother as an idealization of the -- unlocalizable -- *relationship* between her and us, an idealization of primary narcissism. When feminists call for a new representation of femininity, they seem to identify maternity with this idealized misapprehension; and feminism, because it rejects this image and its abuses, sidesteps the real experience that this fantasy obscures. As a result, maternity is repudiated or denied by some avant-garde feminists, while its traditional representations are wittingly or unwittingly accepted by the 'broad mass' of women and men" (1985, 99, emphases in original).

It is difficult to discover any large portion of contemporary feminist thought which rejects motherhood in the way Kristeva seems here to be claiming it does.

Brookner, in her early comments on *Puffball*, also mentions the same thing, a kind of (unlocalizable) feminist wrath expected to be directed at the writer of a book which seems to advocate the kind of return to attention to motherhood which occurs in the novel.

The one feminist treatise which comes to mind is Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1971 [1970]), in which she argues that it is women's continual exploitation via childbearing that forms the root of their oppression; she thus proposes that it is only the externalisation of reproduction from female bodies that will finally bring about women's liberation. Many other feminist analyses of women's experiences of childbearing and childrearing have followed this one, but none of them also follow Firestone in her recommendation that women abandon their

reproductive capacities altogether. Rather, they emphasise the ways in which patriarchy uses women's biological capacity to bear children -- by symbolising this in particular ways -- as a reason to exclude them from the realms of culture and power. In a strange way, Kristeva's "feminists" closely resemble nothing other than the caricatures created by societies hostile to the emergence of feminist movements. These "feminists" are the man-haters and the child-murderers familiar from centuries of patriarchal reaction. Far from "sidestep[ping] the real experience" of pregnancy and motherhood, feminist theories in many disciplines have begun to document these experiences as sympathetically as possible.

The problem with which Weldon is grappling in *Puffball* also appears in Kristeva's text. The only experience of motherhood which Kristeva can envisage other than the "idealization of primary narcissism", which she identifies as the basis of western civilisation's "representation of femininity", is something called "the *real* experience that this fantasy obscures" (my emphasis). She is forced to fall back on a reference to unmediated reality, and thus to implying that there is or can be an experience of motherhood which is not filtered through the process of representation. How ironic it is, then, that it is Kristeva's writing about her own experiences of pregnancy and motherhood (in this essay, in particular) which has brought accusations from critics that she is creating in it precisely the "fantasy of a lost continent" which she repudiates in this passage. The problem for any (feminist) attempt to re-present the female experience of pregnancy is that the existing representations of the state will not simply disappear. Instead, they constantly return, threatening to pull the writer/theorist back into what Kristeva calls the "consecrated representation of femininity", or what I have been calling the

identification of woman with nature. It is not surprising that the entanglement of femininity with motherhood (and, via motherhood, with nature) arouses so much anger and so many accusations, both towards and between feminists. The centrality of this entanglement for women, whether they are mothers or not, is the result of the "pull" of existing representations, and of women's (including feminists') investment and implication in the patriarchally mediated meanings of their own femininity, and experiences of motherhood and pregnancy.

I would now like to return to the parts of *Puffball*, one of which I have already examined, in which something of an other experience of pregnancy exists for Liffey despite the "pull" of existing representations of maternity. The voice of the baby is the sound which this different representation makes, a representation which is simultaneously/neither rational and/nor natural. This sound or "presence", as it is frequently described, is heard or felt by Liffey more than ten times as the events of the novel unfold. These moments are usually those in which Liffey is frightened, upset or threatened in some way. They are also often associated with the presence of an outside and potentially threatening authority, such as Mabs, the masculine world of medicine, and Liffey's mother, Madge. In two crucial sequences, for example, it is the voice of the baby which allows Liffey to gain some measure of both independence and understanding with regard to her own mother. In the first of these, she telephones Madge to tell her that she is pregnant. Madge responds negatively, as she has always responded to Liffey's actions, and Liffey is reminded of her own fear of her mother when, as a child, she would "hesitate at the gate of the house, wondering what [was] to be found within" (*P*, 147), terrified that her mother -- who is an alcoholic -- would be drunk inside. At this point, the baby tells her that

"[i]t's all right.... All that is past" (*P*, 147), and Liffey is calmed and reassured. Later, when Madge unexpectedly comes to visit her, Liffey is able finally to ask about her hitherto unnamed and unknown father. At first, Madge does not want to answer Liffey's questions. But Liffey insists:

The baby gave her courage: compounded the reality of her existence. She could not be wished away, or willed away. 'I want to know,' persisted Liffey, and heard the baby murmur its approval, and leap in delight (*P*, 179).

This is the first time that Liffey feels the baby move, and its movements, like its voice, continue to encourage and protect her from this point onwards.

The baby's presence for Liffey, which I have stated is neither completely natural nor simply rational, does more than reassure her. It also protects her by enabling her to "see more clearly", to understand the actions and motivations of those around her. It does not bring her total understanding or omniscience, however. Rather, it confirms and thus strengthens thoughts which Liffey has. It is the baby which gives Liffey warning that Mabs is the source of some of the malevolent influence around her, that "Mabs was not a friend, she was an enemy" (*P*, 202). Here, the baby does not itself speak, but "dance[s] and laugh[s], to confirm her [Liffey's] conclusion" (*P*, 202). The baby speaks again -- and for the last time -- outright in the most dire moment of the novel, in which Richard is told by Mabs that Tucker is the father of Liffey's child. It tells Liffey that "you must choose now not between good and bad, but between the lesser of two evils. Eat, smile, hope" (*P*, 244). After this climactic and central moment, when Liffey has to walk towards the doctor and help with blood streaming down her legs, the baby is still there, exhorting her to continue by its very presence, but now almost ready to separate from her. The narrator says that "[s]he felt the touch of its spirit, almost for

the last time, still clear, still light and bright, almost elegant" (P, 261). This is precisely the same "light" presence whose "touch" Liffey first feels during the "annunciation" of her pregnancy. Soon after the baby is born via emergency Caesarian section, Liffey is anguished to discover "a great hollow under her ribs where the baby used to live, and a hole in that part of her mind which the baby had used. She had endured some kind of fearful loss" (P, 264).

The baby's presence fades rapidly from the moment of birth. "It spoke to Liffey, but less and less, as its body grew into better proportion to its being. It gave up all appearance of being in charge, of knowing best" (P, 271). Finally, even when Liffey wishes that he would speak, "his spirit was finally cut off from hers. He smiled at her and that was all" (P, 272). These comments from *Puffball's* narrator emphasise two points. Firstly, the connection between mother and baby is named a "spiritual" one, in an attempt to avoid the possibility of the connection being simply named "natural".¹⁴ Secondly, it is not the case that the baby -- masquerading as the force of the natural in its usual guise -- has simply taken over during the pregnancy. Rather, it gives up, here, the "*appearance* of being in charge, of knowing best" (P, 271, my emphasis). The relationship between mother and child, the implication is, was one in which communication and negotiation took place.

Irigaray suggests via a recent collaborative essay with Hélène Rouch that this relationship of negotiation and a particular form of communication may well be found

¹⁴ One might argue that the "spiritual" is a part of the "natural" world inhabited by motherhood and femininity. However, the attempt to create some measure of distinction between the connection being described and that which has been named the "natural" connection between mother and child (and which does not allow the mother to formulate the relationship herself) must be noted.

within the body of the pregnant woman. As Rouch – who is a biology teacher and researcher at the *Lycée Colbert* in Paris – notes, given that half the antigens of an embryo are paternal in origin, the mother's body should activate her defence mechanisms in order to reject that which is foreign to her. This means, in effect, that the maternal body should "reject this other to herself" (Rouch in Irigaray, 1993b, 40). Of course, this does not happen, or all fetuses would be spontaneously aborted. This is because of the presence of the placenta, which prevents maternal defence mechanisms from being activated. However, given that the placenta itself is not entirely maternal in origin, Rouch concludes that there is not a simple suppression of ordinary immunological reactions from the mother. Rather, she says,

there has to be a recognition of the other, of the non-self, by the mother, and therefore an initial reaction from her, in order for placental factors to be produced. The difference between 'self' and other is, so to speak, continuously negotiated (Rouch in Irigaray, 1993b, 41).

This seems to describe something quite similar to what happens in *Puffball* between Liffey and her foetus, and also to explain the force of its presence to her without falling back on the notion of the (pregnant) woman as part of, or inextricably linked with, the irrationally natural. Pregnancy becomes, in this theoretical formulation as it does for Liffey, a state which calls into question the distinction – the fundamental binary opposition – between the natural and the rational. As Irigaray says, "[t]he placental economy is therefore an organized economy, one *not in a state of fusion*, which respects the one and the other" (Irigaray, 1993b, 41, my emphasis).

By the end of *Puffball*, Liffey has learned a great deal more about "inner Liffey, cosmic Liffey, hormones buzzing; heart beating, blood surging, pawn in nature's game" (P, 13). However, although she has left behind the naïve and

trusting "outer Liffey" (P, 13) she is at the start of the novel, she has not simply become her "inner" self. The Liffey of the novel's end is a woman who has been forced by its events to learn to compromise and negotiate. Importantly, her identity is defined in her own thoughts (rather than totally externally by the narrator, as occurred early in *Puffball*). She finds herself less unique than before: "a very average person...much like anyone else", she decides, as she "look[s] in the mirror and laugh[s]" (P, 271). In the novel's closing moments, Liffey uses the dried out ends of the puffballs which had so frightened her when, while she was pregnant, Richard had picked, sliced and cooked them, in order to light the fire in the cottage. They burn very well, and Liffey thinks "that there was some good in them after all" (P, 272). Deciding that this is a "momentous thought," she hopes that the baby will speak and confirm it, "but his spirit was finally cut off from hers. He smiled at her and that was all" (P, 272).

A few days later, Richard returns to Liffey and Martin, and Liffey opens the door and lets him in, "not without reluctance" (P, 272). She decides that Richard, as "father, shuffler of the genes" is "claimed" (P, 272) by his son, and that she has to accept this. The identity which Liffey seems to have found for herself by the end of *Puffball* is by no means an obvious ideal, in feminist terms. It is compromised in many ways, not least of which is her feeling that her accession to her new identity as mother, as "no longer...anything particularly definite" means that she has "become what Richard wanted. He ha[s] triumphed in his absence" (P, 271). Of course, the whole of *Puffball* has been concerned with Liffey's triumphs in the face of -- and perhaps because of -- Richard's increasing absence, so there may be some irony to be found within this statement at its very end.

However, the sense of compromise which makes itself felt at the end of the novel, while not unexpected, is nonetheless clearly felt by both Liffey and the reader. For example, can it be argued that Liffey has discovered a new and emancipated identity via her experiences? Or has she, by the end of the novel, merely learned to accept her ("natural", patriarchally defined) femininity, that part of her which was so repressed at the start of the novel? I have tried to read *Puffball* in a way which answers neither of these questions in the affirmative. In *Puffball*, Weldon presents female identity as defined by the particularly female (sexual and bodily) experience of pregnancy. In some ways, however, this attempt to explore and "shed new light on this obscure topic" (Kristeva, 1985, 113) is a frustrated one. While it may not manage single-handedly to change our conception of female identity, *Puffball* nonetheless exposes the intractable *problem* of finding new ways to signify, symbolise and define femininity, particularly in the face of the "pull" of the binarisms of existing patriarchal identities.

Also important, I think, is the context from which *Puffball* emerges, the context of Weldon's (and perhaps western feminism's) growing realisation of the complexity of the problems facing feminists, both in political reality and in the possibilities open to the (western feminist) creator of fiction written, like *Puffball*, at or after the end of that decade of intense feminist struggle, the 1970s. The less compromised, more satisfyingly feminist visions of female identity contained in Weldon's seventies fiction¹⁵ have vanished from her work. To date, they have not returned.

¹⁵ See, for example, novels such as *The Fat Woman's Joke* (1967), *Female Friends* (1975) and *Little Sisters* (1977).

The Cloning of Joanna May: reproductive technologies, motherhood, identity

"In our social order, women are 'products' used and exchanged by men. Their status is that of merchandise, 'commodities'. How can such objects of use and transaction claim the right to speak and to participate in exchange in general?" (Irigaray, 1985b, 84)

"We have to be careful about one thing: we must not once more kill the mother who was sacrificed to the origins of our culture" (Irigaray, 1991, 43).

The Cloning of Joanna May, published in 1989, contains one of Fay Weldon's most lucid and hilarious explorations of the sexual and bodily identity of contemporary Western women. The novel examines the question of how Joanna May generates an "I" both by and for herself.¹ The central focus of this chapter will be the consequences for female identity of the experience of cloning.

It should be emphasised that I am not trying to speak about a pure, whole and new identity for women. Nor, on the other hand, am I interested in trying to banish the concept of identity itself. With Jane Gallop, I would argue that "[i]dentity must be continually assumed and immediately called into question" (1982, xii). The powerful arguments about specifically female subjectivity and identity put forward by Luce Irigaray are also important in this regard. She argues that all subjectivity as we know it -- and it is only via their subjectivity that human beings define their identities -- is organised by the phallogocentric order and is thus masculine. Irigaray states that "[w]e can assume that every theory of the subject has always

¹ It also deals with the question of whether it is genetic "programming" or environment which determines the identity of any human being, and explores what the effects of cloning individuals -- what could be termed a literal "splitting" of identity -- might be. These aspects of the novel are not central to my thesis and will thus not be dealt with here.

been appropriated by the 'masculine'," and that as a result of this, when woman begins to define her identity by using the same cultural apparatus (phallogocentric language), she "fails to recognise that she is renouncing the specificity of her own relationship to the imaginary" (1985a, 133). Of course, Irigaray also recognises the extreme difficulty of creating a feminine subjectivity and identity, saying that "there is no way I can give you an account of 'speaking (as) woman'; it is spoken, but not in metalanguage" (1985b, 144). She is among those who insist that there is, at present, no "outside" of phallogocentrism, or what she calls the "onto-theo-logic" (1985b, 78). However, she insists that women might be able to "work at destroying the discursive mechanism", in spite of the fact that this "is not a simple undertaking... For how can we introduce ourselves into such a tightly-woven systematicity?" (1985b, 76).

The solution which Irigaray proposes is a complex and controversial one.

She suggests that

[t]here is, in an initial phase, perhaps only one 'path,' the one historically assigned to the feminine: that of *mimicry*. One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it. Whereas a direct feminine challenge to this condition means demanding to speak as a (masculine) 'subject,' that is, it means to postulate a relation to the intelligible that would maintain sexual difference. To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it (1985b, 76).

Critics of this position have accused Irigaray of biological and cultural essentialism, but these arguments do not take into account the extreme care with which she approaches this issue. She is not prescribing the use of patriarchally defined womanhood as a way to overcome patriarchy. To use a pertinent example, she is not saying that women should embrace motherhood as defined by patriarchy in

order to find out what motherhood means to them, and how it influences their bodily and sexual identities. Rather, she is suggesting that

the issue is not one of elaborating a new theory of which woman would be the *subject* or the *object*, but of jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretension to the production of a truth and of a meaning that are necessarily univocal. Which presupposes that women do not aspire simply to be men's equals in knowledge. That they do not claim to be rivalling men in constructing a logic of the feminine that would still take onto-theo-logic as its model, but that they are rather attempting to wrest this question away from the economy of the logos (1985b, 78).

In other words, Irigaray is interested in the construction of an other language, another, feminine syntax which might better be able to express the specificity of women's experience of their bodies without their being forced to "translate" these experiences into the language of phallogocentrism. She tries to inhabit the conventional meanings of femininity, of motherhood, in a knowing, tactical way, and thereby to subvert and alter them. Irigaray suggests that this feminine syntax "could best be deciphered in the gestural code of women's bodies" (1985b, 134), but is also cautious about the ease with which the writing of this different syntax might be accomplished. She says that

[t]here are also more and more texts written by women in which another writing is beginning to assert itself, even if *it is still often repressed by the dominant discourse*. For my part, I tried to put that syntax into play in *Speculum*², but not simply, to the extent that a single gesture obliged me to go back through the realm of the masculine imaginary. Thus I could not, *I cannot install myself just like that, serenely and directly, in that other syntactic functioning - and I do not see how any woman could* (1985b, 134-5, my emphases).

The problem of finding a way to express feminine experiences via a language, and in particular, a verbal language, is an issue which has long been part

² This is a reference to Irigaray's earlier and highly controversial work of feminist psychoanalytic philosophy, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985a).

of the interests of feminist literary critics. As Irigaray's contribution makes clear, it is by no means an easy task for women writers, critics and theorists to imagine what such a language would consist of, and how it could be written and understood. In this discussion of *The Cloning of Joanna May*, I will be attempting to show how Weldon is similar to Irigaray in that her protagonists do not simply accept and occupy the feminine position of being "the inverse, indeed the underside, of the masculine" (Irigaray, 1985b, 159). At the same time, however, she also does not install them "within this lack, this negative, even by denouncing it, nor by reversing the economy of sameness, by turning the feminine into *the standard for 'sexual difference'*," but rather tries to allow them "to *practice* that difference" (Irigaray, 1985b, 159, second emphasis mine).

What do I mean, then, by the term "reproductive technologies"? The term encompasses both conceptive and contraceptive technologies. The events of *The Cloning of Joanna May* are primarily concerned with conceptive technologies, but I will retain the term "reproductive technologies" in order to describe them. Such technologies encompass the following: artificial or donor insemination, sex preselection, *in-vitro* fertilisation, surrogate motherhood, artificial parthenogenesis, egg fusion and cloning (*The New Our Bodies, Ourselves*, 1984, 317-324). Artificial or donor insemination, the simplest and oldest of these techniques (and the only one recommended by the radical feminist health handbook *Our Bodies, Ourselves*) was first performed in 1776 (Wacjman, 1991, 80), and requires very little technical know-how, much less the presence of a doctor, since it means simply finding a willing sperm donor and inserting a few syringefuls of semen at the time ovulation is due.

The rest are very different. They require high levels of technology, including professionalised knowledge and sophisticated instrumentation. They are also presented to those who use them as solutions to infertility, which has been given the status of disease by the very existence of these technologies. As Judy Wajcman states in her book *Feminism confronts technology*, "[t]he very existence of the technologies changes the situation even if the woman does not use them. Her 'infertility' is now treatable, and she must in a sense actively decide not to be treated" (1991, 62). The other three technologies which are currently in use are sex preselection, and *in-vitro* fertilisation and surrogate motherhood, which are closely related to each other. The latter technologies are both possible and, in privileged Western terms, fairly commonplace. They are also subject to an intensive feminist critique, represented mainly by the radical feminist group FINRRAGE (Feminist International Network of Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering), formed in 1984. This group does not celebrate these new technologies as progress towards the end of women's oppression via the externalisation of reproduction, an argument put forward in Shulamith Firestone's feminist politico-philosophical book, *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970). On the contrary, it castigates them as "designed less to help the infertile woman than to appease men's envy of women's reproductive power" (Baruch, 1988, 138).

Michelle Stanworth recently organised the contents of this critique into seven subsections or arguments. Reproductive technologies are, it is argued, "unsuccessful, unsafe, unkind, unnecessary, unwanted, unsisterly and unwise" (1990, 290-1). In response to these arguments, Stanworth says that feminists need to "be sensitive to the needs of the infertile," and shows how "[i]n some accounts,

conceptive technologies have been used to delineate a boundary between 'good' motherhood and 'bad'" (1990, 296). She also insists that "the attempt to reclaim motherhood as a female accomplishment need not mean giving the natural priority over the technological - that pregnancy is natural and good, technology unnatural and bad" (Stanworth, 1990, 299), while stating that in her view, "[a]ny trend towards enhancing the legal rights that flow from genetic parenthood, as opposed to real parental commitment, would work decisively to the detriment of women" (1987, 22).

However, even Stanworth's critique -- which emphasises as much as possible the problems of the FINRRAGE view of women involved with reproductive technologies -- has to acknowledge that current uses of these technologies are highly conservative, and take note of the fact that infertility treatment is almost exclusively aimed at women, with male infertility barely even acknowledged. Indeed, "the emphasis placed on women's right to use these technologies to their own ends tends to obscure the way in which historical and social relations are built into the technologies themselves" (Wacjman, 1991, 62). Most importantly, "...only those technologies that reinforce the value of having one's 'own' child, one that is genetically related to oneself, are being developed" (Wacjman, 1991, 62). I say that this is important because reproductive technologies *do* -- as is evident in the fictional reworkings of the subject found in *The Cloning of Joanna May* -- have extremely disruptive, and feminist, potential. This is because they (and particularly, the hitherto unused techniques of artificial parthenogenesis, egg fusion and cloning) "place the whole notion of genetic parenthood, and thus family relationships, in jeopardy" (Wacjman, 1991, 62). Even in the existing case of *in-vitro* fertilisation combined with surrogacy, "a child can now have three 'mothers': a genetic mother

who supplies the ovum, a gestational mother who supplies the uterine environment, and a nurturing mother who provides the postnatal care" (Baruch, 1988, 137). As Juliette Zipper and Selma Sevenhuisen put it, "[t]he issue of surrogacy raises questions about the naturalness of the mother-child bond" (1987, 120). This is doubtless the reason for the large amount of media attention -- in the form of coverage of court cases and numerous fictionalised accounts of these -- which has been given to the subject in recent years.

However, in spite of this, it should be stressed that it is at this point now primarily possible, via developments in surrogacy, for a man to reproduce by quite literally buying "a womb of his own" (Baruch, 1988, 136) and showing very little concern for the woman to whom it happens to be attached. The contention that this is the final assault on the female body by "patriarchal desire for control over reproduction...[which stems from] male fear of female procreativity and the quest for immortality" (Wacjman, 1991, 59) seems hard to dismiss. With these arguments in mind, then, how does Weldon's fictional use of reproductive technology deal with what appears to be the mutual antagonism of women's interests and technologies which are developed and controlled largely by men? Since, as Stanworth puts it, "reproductive technologies have become a battleground on which are being waged important campaigns about the significance of blood ties" (Stanworth, 1987, 19), how does the battle develop in *The Cloning of Joanna May*?³

³ It should be kept in mind, of course, that Weldon's stated political view of reproductive technologies will not necessarily be clearly reflected in the novel. She has recently written that "[i]n *The Cloning of Joanna May* I take birth away from women, and hand it over to men: as they are of course busy doing for themselves in the real world" (1994c, 206). This assessment of reproductive technology may well be realistically accurate, but it reflects only part of the manner in which it is brought

Briefly, the plot proceeds as follows. Joanna May is the sixty-year-old childless ex-wife of Carl May, a powerful British businessman who has risen from extremely inauspicious beginnings (he was kept in a kennel as a child until rescued by social workers) to become head of Britnuc, a fictional company which owns, among other things, the various nuclear power stations in England. The novel begins at about the time the nuclear power station at Chernobyl breaks down and begins pouring radioactivity into the air of Europe. Joanna May discovers, via a meeting precipitated by the appearance in Carl's life of a young woman named Bethany (who was brought up in a brothel), that Carl, with the aid of a Dr Holly, created four clones of her when she was in Dr Holly's clinic thirty years before. Only later does she discover that the abortion she had been obtaining at the time (Carl did not, he said, wish to have children) was in fact merely an excuse to obtain her ovum, since Carl was aware that her pregnancy was an hysterical one. In the interim, the reader is introduced to the four clones -- who are in fact the products of artificial parthenogenesis, rather than cloning in its strict sense⁴ -- who are of course all female. The clones are named Jane, Julie, Gina and Alice, and Weldon introduces their stories, one after the other, in several third person-narrated sections. Other sections are also told in the third person, excepting the pieces of Joanna May's first-person "year of strange events: some wonderful, some terrible"

into play in the novel, as I hope to show in the rest of this chapter.

⁴ Artificial parthenogenesis involves the stimulation of a single ovum until it begins to reproduce itself, while cloning means "replac[ing] the nucleus of an *in vitro* fertilized egg with the nucleus from a skin or other body cell of a chosen person," (*The New Our Bodies, Ourselves*, 1984, 323) thus making the child genetically identical to the chosen person.

(*The Cloning of Joanna May*, hereafter *C*, 7). Eventually, Joanna May finds the clones, and Carl May dies after taking a public-relations swim in a nuclear cooling tank. He has, by this time, had both his wife's adulterous lover, Isaac (who is an Egyptologist), and her much younger lover and gardener, Oliver, murdered, and has also planned to kill Jane and Gina, and keep as his "new wives" Julie and Alice.

Carl May's relationship to the founding force of his early childhood, his mother, is a highly negative one. As Dr Holly, creator of the clones, wonders about Carl May's motives for refusing to allow his wife to become a mother while simultaneously using her body to produce offspring himself, "could a man brought up in a kennel, barking in his heart, baying at the moon, really ever know himself?" (*C*, 123) It is, of course, Carl May's mother who kept him in the kennel, and the narrator gestures towards the power of the feminine as a force with which Carl has to reckon in this sentence, since it is the moon at which he "bays" in anger and frustration. The suggestion that Carl might be insane, "barking in his heart," is also hinted at here. Angela, Joanna May's friend and the highly intelligent wife of one of Carl's employees, is quite convinced that Carl May is mad, telling both her husband and Joanna May of her opinion on several occasions (*C*, 167, 173, 267). However, Joanna May dismisses this view of Carl, insisting that "he just likes to get his own way, and get his own back. He's childish" (*C*, 167). In other words, Carl is trying to revenge himself upon the body of his/the mother, trying to "get his own way" rather than fall under the sway of her frightening authority. The exaggerated power of Carl May's mother (who is never given a name in the novel, which adds to the reader's sense of her as a mythical or allegorical figure) renders her the model of the castrating feminine which masculinity so fears and reviles. This mother is more

other than mother, more "the polymorphic, orgasmic body, both laughing and desiring," than "the woman who is...guarantor of the community" (Ainley, 1990, 58), the one who plays the part of an "object of use and transaction", in terms described by Irigaray in the epigraph to this chapter.

Carl May and Dr Holly's view of the woman whom they have cloned, and the "reason" they did not bother to inform her of the cloning process, is as follows:

Joanna May, the calm, normal, healthy, beautiful and apparently well-balanced woman whom they had, out of love, respect and admiration so successfully reproduced, was still a woman, and therefore liable to extreme, hysterical and unhelpful reaction: she was a creature of the emotions, rather than reason. That was the female lot (C, 122).

The reproduction, here, of the phallogocentric language which so carefully conceals its fear of the feminine -- as envisioned and described by itself -- by pretending only to revere and respect the feminine, might remind the (feminist) reader of Jane Gallop's assertion that "it remains an open question whether there truly exists any adult sexuality, whether there is any masculinity that is beyond the phallic phase, that does not need to equate femininity with castration" (1988, 125).⁵ Certainly, both Carl May and Dr Holly view the world as so chaotic and directionless that it must be their duty in some way to play the God who, according to Joanna May, "flew off in a pet" (C, 200) when confronted by contraception, abortion, and finally the process of cloning.⁶ They felt

⁵ This is also Joanna May's view of Carl -- as explained above -- since she emphasises Carl's "childishness" rather than calling him insane. Patricia Craig, the *TLS* reviewer of the novel, who writes exasperatedly that "[e]xchanges of the utmost childishness take place between the Chairman of Britnuc and his repudiated wife" (1989, 518), is, I think, inadvertently making the same point as Gallop, and Weldon.

⁶ The short narrative of the days on which "God flew off in three stages" (C, 200) forms an amusing feminist rewriting of the history of the theme of interference

that an evolutionary process which caused so much grief could surely be improved upon by man: genetic engineering would hardly add to the sum of human misery, so great a sum that was, and might just possibly make things a good deal better (C, 116).

Science is thus the power they turn to in order to attempt to improve upon the chaos of the world as they see it. This vision of the world is one which remains with Carl May until the very end of the novel. Confronted by the Barbers of the Bath, the "rock band" he has hired as his private squad of bully-boys and clone-trailers, he despairingly decides that all his "efforts on behalf of the human race" have been futile, for

how could science hold back this tide of stupidity, flesh and blood rioting, breeding uncontrollably, surplus upon surplus, so excess a quantity that quality went out the window, more and more and more, this plague of unthinking, all-feeling humans, no better than a plague of locusts, chattering, devouring, destructive, monstrous (C, 314).

Carl May both fears and detests the natural world, the world of irrationality, chance and excess. His attempts to reckon with this world are rooted in his monstrous childhood, and in his view of the feminine body as the site or root cause of the disorder of the natural. These attempts include, centrally, his cloning of Joanna May, but the impulse to control and exert order on the natural via scientific method can also be seen in his links with nuclear power, and detected in his careful (but always detached and ironic) "watching" of the forces of nature and chance via his Divination Department.⁷

with the process of "natural selection" at this point. Joanna May tells the story of her view that God the Father abandoned "mankind" (C, 200) on the day the first woman practices contraception: the Son leaves with the first abortion, and the Holy Ghost on the day that her "own" artificial parthenogenesis takes place.

⁷ Carl May is thus a symbol of the scientific in general in the novel, and might be said to illustrate the view that "[g]iven that science is one of the last figures, if not

The reason that Carl started Britnuc's Divination Department, "housed on the eighth floor, a floor which had heating and ventilation problems" (C, 212) was in order to prove the uselessness of interpretive systems which are not those of science. His view is that "[t]o tell the cards, the stars, the lines of the palm, tea-leaves and so forth was to divine what was in the fortune-teller's heart, and that was all" (C, 212). Still, in spite of this, the Department registers the prophecies it comes up with in the same way as all the departments' reports are written, and on occasion, "recommendations from the eighth floor would be allowed to tip the balance this way or that" (C, 213). The Divination Department is also his replacement for Dr Holly, who decides that he would rather not risk death via the Curse of the Pharaohs when Carl May asks him to try to clone a "real" ancient Egyptian by using dehydrated cells from a mummified body. Carl May is highly offended by Dr Holly's refusal to attempt this experiment, and the pair become estranged. The Department is thus also part of Carl's attempts to prove Dr Holly's superstitions about "the past catch[ing] up with you!" (C, 125), to use the doctor's words, false and invalid. Carl's PA simply throws away many of the memos that come to his office from the Department, but decides to send through its final one, which deals with predictions about the day set for Carl May and Bethany's swim in one of his nuclear cooling tanks. This is planned as a PR event, in order to placate the fears of the British public about nuclear power stations in the wake of the explosion at Chernobyl. The memo warns of very bad auspices for the day in

the last figure, used to represent absolute knowledge, it is -- ethically -- essential that we ask science to reconsider the non-neutrality of the supposedly universal subject that constitutes its scientific theory and practice (Irigaray, 1993a, 121).

question:

The common pack had produced the Ace of Spades 40 per cent above probability: the Tarot pack the Tower 90 per cent likewise; the *I Ching*, the Chinese Book of Oracles, that normally sedate and encouraging book, had come up with No. 23 (Splitting Apart) four times running with mention of Tears of Blood; the prophetic dreamer had wakened screaming, the encephalic discs popping off of their own accord; so far undiagnosed telekinetic forces had shredded the Welsh map, and teacups came up repeatedly with coffins on the rim (C, 334).

Carl May's response is to dismiss the claims as "gobbledygook" (C, 334) -- as he has always done, really -- and go ahead with the swim, which leads fairly quickly to his death by radiation poisoning.

The binary opposition at work here is obviously that which exists between science (in the forms of nuclear physics and Western medicine) and the chancy laws of nature (as represented by Egyptology, the Tarot pack, various other forms of divination, and femininity). As fast as the opposition is set up in the novel, however, its terms begin to collapse into each other, to become confused. The status of the scientific as the founding and governing term of the binary couple becomes less and less certain. The reader learns that sometimes the needles on the dials indicating fallout at the power stations go completely around the dials and the people watching them don't notice. Other times, however, the dials just don't work. So both the scientific and the natural (the "normal" human, expected to make mistakes) are subject to disorder, to error, to the random. In industrialised societies, scientific knowledge has taken on the status of "a kind of religious belief...[and is] considered superior, 'objective', and closer to the truth" (Spallone, 1989, 11). However, this view is not contained in *The Cloning of Joanna May*, where the difference between the scientific and the natural seems to be simply that the

practitioners of the natural (or the related term, "supernatural") are more accepting of the force of "fate". Carl's Divination Department might thus be viewed as his concession to the (super)natural, and his failure, finally, to take it into account eventually destroys all Carl's attempts to contain and control "fate".

What, then, might this force of "fate" be? Fay Weldon's use of the term (in this novel and elsewhere) implies that "fate" is that which causes the deconstruction of binary oppositions, such as that of science/(super)nature to which I've been referring. "Fate" cannot be simplistically *equated* with the natural, since the natural, like "woman" herself, cannot exist outside of or without the scientific (or masculine, in terms of femininity) under which it is always subsumed. It is not simply "nature" which disrupts Carl's attempts to "get his own way" -- to make children without the interference of a mother, or to recreate humanity in whichever image he feels would be an improvement on the current model -- but that which exceeds and refuses the categorisation of the world into the opposition "science" versus "nature". "Fate", in Weldon's terms, might thus be said to be the name for something which points to the contingency of the control of the scientific over nature, while simultaneously refusing the idea that a "better" (more "natural"?) notion or reading of nature could provide a way out of the problems caused by that dominance and control.

There is one oppositional couple which *The Cloning of Joanna May* does not disrupt or call into question. It is that created by Carl May and Isaac King, the "bad" and "good" men, respectively, in Joanna May's life. As Joanna May herself says to Angela, "Isaac was so much the opposite of Carl" (C, 82). Isaac is similar to Carl in one respect only: both seem dissatisfied with the present. Instead of trying to shape the present (and future) to his own vision, as Carl does, Isaac instead has devoted

himself to the past. He is an Egyptologist, who wants to bring to life "a benign and beautiful past, like no other" (C, 86). He is also described by Joanna May as "one of those rare and valuable people who are, or appear to be, totally innocent in their life's work," (C, 86) or, in other words, the antithesis of Carl. From Isaac, Joanna May learns "many important things," while she says that Carl taught her only "boring things, mostly about how to keep him happy" (C,126). She says that "Isaac taught me to accept mystery," in contrast to Carl's belief in straightforward "cause and effect, action and consequence, and not much else, except the laws of probability" (C, 127).

It is during her description of her adulterous relationship with Isaac that Joanna May discusses "fate". She also places the word in inverted commas, indicating the term's inadequacy even as she uses it. There is no other term to use for the process she is trying to describe, "the sense of a multifarious, infinitely complex, dreamy yet purposeful universe," so it must be used, even though it is "altogether too singular a word, too single-purposed, like a chisel driven hard into the delicacy of experience" (C, 127). Thus it is from Isaac that Joanna May gets her philosophical view of the world, although she does recognise that he is not very good at living, practically, in the world. That is what Carl excels at, and which Joanna May learns from him. It is not at all surprising that Carl removes Isaac so easily and thoroughly from the world, and from Joanna May herself. It is also Isaac who introduces Joanna May to the Tarot pack, which becomes one of the central symbolic structures of the novel. The hand of cards he deals for Joanna May, which she insists must "tell [her] fortune," (C,130) contains herself at its centre, in the form of the Empress from the major arcana, and surrounds her with the four Queens:

Wands, Pentacles, Swords and Cups. The hand also contains the Hierophant, whom Isaac immediately links with Carl, and as the ninth card, which signifies "the final outcome," (C, 131) Death. Joanna May is frightened, but Isaac is not. He says that the card is reversed, and means "rebirth, new life" (C, 131). Both are correct, since the novel ends with Isaac and Carl May dead, but with Joanna May as mother -- finally, at the age of sixty -- of a new, cloned "little Carl" (C, 347).

Although each of the four Queens is later explicitly and specifically linked with one of Joanna May's four clones, at this point in the novel, they symbolize aspects of her own identity. Directly above her card, the Empress, is the Queen of Wands, who stands for the power of the intellect. This is the ruling card, while the Queen of Pentacles, symbol of the strength of the material world, is what, in Joanna May's terms, "underlay me" (C, 131). On the left of the Empress is the Queen of Swords, the capacity for endurance, which Joanna May is leaving behind as she moves towards the aesthetic and sensual perception symbolized by the Queen of Cups, situated on the right. At this point, Joanna May is looking back at events which occurred some time before the "year of strange events: some wonderful, some terrible" (C, 7) which form the main section of her narrative, and is interpreting them. Her development from the position of a woman with the "capacity for endurance" -- obviously very necessary for being Carl May's wife -- to one who has "aesthetic and sensual perception" of the world around her forms the central, first-person narrative of the novel. This retrospective development of Joanna May's (feminine) identity, told in her own words as a kind of disjointed autobiography, begins with her childhood.

Joanna May is born Joanna Parsons, the only daughter of an upper middle

class doctor and his bridge-playing wife. She remembers her childhood as lonely and "muted" (C, 261) or "muffled" (C, 260): thus, she explains her original attraction to Carl as the relief of finding someone "loud and clear... his edges were somehow defined" (C, 261). A particular incident from her childhood is related in careful detail. There are two separate moments in the incident, recognisable as the defining moments of Joanna May's subjectivity. She precedes them with the comment that "the feelings of childhood haunt us... [t]hose initial pains grow stronger with the years, instead of fading, as one might expect, they merely afflict the present more and more" (C, 259). The first part of this memory, in which Joanna Parsons, as a small girl, watches from the stairs as a female patient is admitted to her father's house and rooms in Harley Street, involves a realisation about gender:

On the step stood an old woman. She had on a black coat with a fur collar and brought with her an air of what I can now see was genteel despair mingled with anxiety: the sense of a life misspent, of opportunities missed, of knights in white armour who never came, of husbands, children who were never grateful. So many of my father's patients were defeated women. Women, I perceived at that moment, were by their very nature supplicants. The outside world knocked on our front door and yielded up its goodies, and its goodies were nothing but female desolation, decay and disappointment (C, 260).

The memory is self-consciously reconstructed and interpreted, as the phrase "what I can *now* see was" indicates. It also contains the child's first recognition that the female gender to which she belongs is not one which can expect much in the way of good fortune and happiness, but rather through its misery brings life's benefits to those who (like her father) purport to assist and help it. There is an interesting tension here between the child's perception "at that moment" that women are innately or naturally "supplicants," people who must ask a higher authority humbly and earnestly for everything they have, and the idea that such women are the

"goodies," the *products* of the "outside world". The obvious question to be asked here is whether Joanna May believes that women's status as -- more or less -- beggars is their natural fate, or believes that this status is one which has been politically imposed upon them? The phrasing of this "obvious question" is, however, misleading. This is because it asks about the narrating consciousness of the novel rather than that of Joanna Parsons, the little girl on the staircase. This contradiction regarding the way the origins of women's oppression are viewed (and only expressed by Joanna May as an adult consciousness) complicates the little girl's attempts to make sense of her self as subject. As Simone de Beauvoir writes, the little girl experiences from a very young age

a conflict between her autonomous existence and her objective self, her 'being-the-other'; she is taught that to please she must try to please, she must make herself object; she should therefore renounce her autonomy (de Beauvoir, 1972, 308).

She cannot decide (even as an adult) whether she is "by her very nature a supplicant" too, or whether she is being forced and convinced to behave in a particular way by the social connotations of her femininity.

The second part of the childhood memory related by Joanna May is necessarily inflected by the moment of consciousness of gender difference which immediately precedes it. In this section, Joanna May says,

I remember standing on the stair as my father's patient was let into the house, and voices sounded, muffled by closed doors, and I knew I was cut off from the real world; that I was alone: that other people would never quite touch me, or me them: that I was only acting this child upon the stair: there was no real and undeceitful me: therefore the voices would always be muffled. The prescience was true: children fall into uncontrollable grief when they realize, small as they are, certain truths about the world, and about themselves. 'I just feel like crying,' the small child will explain. Don't believe it. The future is seen: the grief is real and profound (C, 260-1).

Once again, this section contains both the memory itself and the adult explanation and clarification of it. The sense of extreme loneliness and isolation expressed here is analogous to de Beauvoir's explanation that the child "recognizes his [sic] reflection in a mirror... [and] his ego becomes so fully identified with this reflected image that it is formed only in being projected" (de Beauvoir, 1972, 297). The result, as I stated earlier, is that the existence of identity and of subjectivity can only be generated as "necessarily alien and constraining" (Gallop, 1982, xii). Joanna Parsons certainly feels this "symbolic castration" (Whitford, 1991b, 75) on the stairs, Joanna May recognises and explains it years later, and thus Weldon never posits a female identity for Joanna May which escapes – or even attempts to escape -- this fundamental limitation. What is of particular interest here is, however, the way in which Joanna Parsons' particular, *sexed* experience of the child's discovery of "finiteness, solitude, forlorn desertion in a strange world" (de Beauvoir, 1972, 296) is conveyed via these memories. It serves as a kind of alteration or revision of theories of childhood experience from a feminine point of view, expressing first and foremost the contradiction of emerging as a female subject, but also taking cognisance of the impossibility of having access to experience and identity in any simple and direct way. I would argue that Weldon here comes very close to the theoretical stance of Luce Irigaray, for both recognise that the "normal" development of the little girl is fraught with problems which are, at present, unsymbolized and thus unrecognised by western culture. Both are thus engaged in a project which makes it clear that the existing theories of the development of identity -- such as the psychoanalytic account given by Freud and Lacan -- are theories of masculine development in which the little girl is forced to find a way to develop, by

accommodating herself to phallogocentrism.

Joanna May explains her marriage to Carl in terms of this childhood trauma, and in the process expresses her view of herself as damaged by her accession to a feminine identity in a similar way to the manner in which Carl is damaged by the savagery of his early childhood. Although "Carl had suffered cruelty and hardship, and I had not," Joanna May says that she "knew a different kind of cruelty, but the same kind of terror - the inevitability of illness, age, death: the impotence of love" (C, 261). This parallel makes of the "normal" feminine experience of subjectivity something as "abused" in childhood as the most lurid of child abuse stories (such as Carl's).⁸ It is echoed by many feminists, both purposefully and inadvertently, and is particularly evident in discussions of the relationship between mother and daughter. For example, de Beauvoir compares the mother creating of her daughter "a woman like [herself], manifesting a zeal in which arrogance and resentment are mingled," with "pederasts, gamblers, drug addicts... who at once take pride in belonging to a certain confraternity and feel humiliated by the association: they endeavour with eager proselytism to gain new adherents" (1972, 309). This startling parallel, I would argue, emerges from the problems and contradictions which arise for women in a phallogocentric order.

As Irigaray says, this has a lot to do with "one thing which has been singularly neglected, barely touched on, in the theory of the unconscious: *the*

⁸ Shoshana Felman has recently come to a similar conclusion while examining women's autobiography in terms of the concept of psychic trauma: she says "[i]ndeed, I will suggest -- in line with what has recently been claimed by feminist psychiatrists and psychotherapists -- that every woman's life contains, explicitly or in implicit ways, the story of a trauma" (1993, 16).

relation of woman to the mother and the relation of women among themselves"

(1985b, 124). The exploration of these relationships in *The Cloning of Joanna May* proves crucial to Joanna May's attempts to make some sense of her own identity once she has realised that being Carl's wife, far from being "an opportunity for being healed, for becoming real," (C, 261) as she initially hopes, merely makes her "Carl May's wife" (C, 132). Joanna May's own relationship with motherhood is irrevocably affected by Carl May, who attempts to separate children from mothers, with some success. Not only does he (initially) prevent Joanna May from herself becoming a mother, he also separates her from her own mother. Joanna May says:

My mother died on the fourth anniversary of my wedding to Carl May. I felt nothing. Carl May had somehow made my feelings for my own mother illicit - as if my life began with my marriage, and that nothing that went before was of any significance: not even the root of my very being, my mother (C, 133).

The link between mother and daughter is thus severed by the daughter's becoming someone's wife. This is far from an unusual claim, in feminist terms. Gallop, for example, reading Freud on jokes, says that "[m]en exchange women for heterosexual purposes, but the real intercourse is that exchange between men" (1988, 37). This patriarchal exchange leaves women both isolated from other women -- as no such exchange occurs between them -- and cut off from the possibility of any kind of feminine genealogy (which might have been created via their mothers) since they are named either by father or husband, within the patronymic. Irigaray, in the first epigraph to this chapter, speaks of the same dynamic: the exchange of women between men which renders them separate from (and in constant competition with) other women. Irigaray notes how Freud, in his analysis of the young girl's negotiation of the Oedipus complex, states that the

daughter has to begin to hate her mother in order to accede to her identity as feminine, and asks, "[d]oesn't that mean that it is impossible -- within our current value system -- for a girl to achieve a satisfactory relation to the woman who has given her birth?" (1985b, 143) In other words, a woman must turn away from her mother long before she meets her husband, who merely completes the separation of daughter from mother, resulting in the sort of isolation which Joanna May describes feeling in terms of her mother. The problem of the relationship between mother and daughter is thus one of the lack of any adequate representations, any discourse -- Irigaray calls it "another `syntax,' another `grammar' of culture" (1985b, 143), with careful quotation marks -- which can express the relationship. The sense of separation and isolation emerges, paradoxically, from the fact that the two women involved (mother and daughter) are *not* adequately differentiated or separated from each other: "strictly speaking, they make neither one nor two, neither has a name, meaning, sex of her own, neither can be `identified' with respect to the other" (Irigaray, 1985b, 143).

What, then, might the solution to this sense of isolation and separation be?

Gallop suggests that

[w]omen need to reach `the same': that is, be `like men,' able to represent themselves. But they also need to reach `the same,' `the homo': their own homosexual economy, a female homosexuality that ratifies and glorifies female standards. The two `sames' are inextricably linked (1982, 74).

Leaving aside the immensely difficult and hopefully unanswerable question of what "female standards" are, this is a useful description of the manner in which Joanna May does find ways, during her "year of strange events" (C, 347), finally (if briefly) to name herself, to say "I, Joanna May. Or perhaps now, just Joanna" (C, 326). Her

identity as both *and simultaneously* daughter and mother is absolutely central to this. It is thus her acknowledgement of and meeting with the clones, whom she calls "my sisters, my twins, my clones, my children" (C, 324), which I will now examine.

When first told about the clones, during her confrontation with Carl at Britnuc, Joanna May is "shocked into calmness, [then]... consider[ing] herself split into five... her gorge rose in her throat" (C, 141). Shortly afterwards, she says that she is "horrified,... terrified, I don't know what to do with myself at all, whatever myself means now" (C, 157). She has immediately grasped the fact that the cloning will affect her sense of herself in some way, but is unable to assess how this will occur or what the outcome will be. When Joanna May returns to her home after this confrontation, she discovers her young lover, Oliver, murdered by Carl May, together with a Tarot card message which she interprets as notification of Carl's intention to "kill the clones" (C, 204) as part of his punishment of her for her (repeated) unfaithfulness. At this point, Joanna May is uncertain that she wants ever to meet the clones, saying that "I'm not at all sure that I recognize their right to life, these thefts from me, these depletions of my 'I', these early symptoms of the way the world is going. I might myself be rather in favour of termination" (C, 204). However, she hires the Maverick detective agency to trace the process of the clones' creation, and is given a detailed report-back by a young detective named Mavis. Unmoved at first by Mavis' injunction to "reclaim your sisters!... both in the political and the family sense," (C, 240-1) in spite of Mavis' similarity to Oliver and obvious "energy, common sense and determination," (C, 241) Joanna May does finally decide to fight for her clones when she discovers that her apparently terminated pregnancy, during which her ovary was removed by Dr Holly for the

cloning process, was in fact an hysterical one. The fact that Carl never told her of this fills Joanna May with sufficient outrage to insist that "he shan't have the clones. I want them. I need them. They're *mine*" (C, 246).

In this section of the novel, Joanna May seems to reclaim some of what was hinted at by her hysterical pregnancy, and removed from her via Carl May's treatment of that hysteria/pregnancy. Even though Carl is able to quell the initial potential expressed through Joanna May's body in the pregnancy, its "products" -- the clones -- do eventually become the (real) embodiments of that which their "mother" cannot consciously and rationally express. This is, however, not her "natural" desire to be a mother, but is part of Joanna May's attempts to make sense of and express her own sense of self. The end results of Joanna May's hysterical pregnancy thus emphasise the manner in which the hysteric turns

passivity into activity by taking on, in the most extreme forms, what is expected, but to such an extreme degree that the end result is the opposite of compliance: it unsettles the system by throwing back to it what it cannot accept about its own operations (Grosz, 1989, 138).

The pregnancy does make a mother of Joanna May, first of the clones and then of "little Carl," (C, 347) but it is such an "extreme" and unusual kind of motherhood that it disrupts the system of patrilineal authority rather than -- as conventional motherhood does -- reinforcing and providing the "raw material" for that authority.

The narrative structure of *The Cloning of Joanna May* is far from linear. Not only is the whole of Joanna May's first-person narrative disjointed in terms of the times at which various events occur and are related to the reader, but neither does the third-person narrative maintain itself as a parallel narrative to the self-conscious retrospective perspective of Joanna May. At the point at which she decides to find

the clones, for example, they have already begun to find each other within the third person narrative, which has also given the reader a fairly full description of each of their lives. They are also, at this stage, each clearly identified with one of the four Queens of the Tarot pack: Jane Jarvis is the Queen of Wands, Julie Rainer the Queen of Pentacles, Gina Herriot the Queen of Swords and Alice Morthampton, the Queen of Cups. They are clearly designated as these symbolic characters at the point when they first meet each other. Julie and Gina are the first to meet, in a McDonalds in which they have both, uncharacteristically, taken refuge after particularly unpleasant experiences. Gina, who does not want to return home to her abusive husband, accepts Julie's offer of her empty, lonely and childless house as a refuge. Jane and Alice's meeting is less circumstantial: Jane goes to Alice's house to interview her for a magazine article. These meetings in turn lead to Gina and Jane confronting their (birth)mothers about their origins, and the four clones eventually all meet at Dr Holly's Bulstrode Clinic.

When allied with each other against what they perceive to be a common enemy, the clones are a model of powerful solidarity. Dealing with Dr Holly, for example, they are seen to have "rapidly acquired the habit... of dividing up a sentence amongst them and handing it out, with fourfold emphasis" (C, 302). Dr Holly decides that they produce "a kind of wave motion of feeling and thought" (C, 302) and feels that "their energy bisected him" (C, 304). He is also disappointed, although not surprised, by their lack of gratitude towards him. When confronted, finally, by "the detail of their birth," or as Alice says, "[n]ot birth... genesis" (C, 306), they are all shaken and upset, but are still basically united:

Gina began to snivel at the notion of being unnatural. Alice slapped Gina:

Julie comforted Gina; Jane restrained Alice's hand. They swirled around a little, touching, hugging, patting, settled down again (C, 307).

After this, the clones and Joanna May meet. Initially, the clones greet Joanna May as "Mother!" and ask her for "a proper mother's report" (C, 328) on them. She agrees to give them her "maternal view" (C, 328) and proceeds to say that

[s]he, Joanna, didn't like one bit the way Alice had taken back her hairline; it was vulgar; she felt Julie's sweatshirt was too informal considering this was her house and she had guests... she thought Jane should comb her hair properly -- and it was much too short -- and Gina should lose some weight and stop smoking (C, 328-9).

Then, after trying to justify her criticisms, Joanna May stops speaking, and the narrator says that "[s]he had shocked herself as well as them" (C, 329). She apologises and explains that she has been trying to act like an ordinary mother, attempting to

make the daughter as much like her as possible, unthread, unknit the father in her. In this case, as it happens, my father is your father: you *are* me, so there's no point in me doing it, but still I can't help it (C, 329).

On one level, this analysis is close to those offered by de Beauvoir and Irigaray: the mother tries to make the daughter in her own image. However, Weldon gives her own particular reason for this impulse in the mother. Rather than simply having no way to separate from and then signify the difference in the daughter's identity, the mother is engaged in an active struggle against the father, which she -- accidentally, as it were -- exerts through and "takes out on" the daughter.⁹ For Joanna May, at least, the only way out of the problem is to renounce the title of mother altogether.

⁹ Weldon recognises the difficulties of mother-daughter relationships more openly elsewhere; recently, she has written of her own experience of motherhood: "Thank God I only have boys. I used to long for girls" (1994a, 59).

This resolution is obviously a problematic one if examples of solutions to the problem of "real" mother-daughter relationships and signification are sought in women's writing. It seems to me, however, that it is inappropriate to expect from women writers the solutions to a problem which is, for all women, filled with contradiction and ambivalence. In many ways, the "'free play' with the primarily erotic boundaries of the mother's body, of death, in men's texts" (Jardine, 1981, 229) is not so simply available to women, who are also related to the mother's body more directly since they are, or could be, part of that historical and material "body" themselves.

Joanna May is scathing: "[i]f this is motherhood," she says, "save me from it. I always wanted it, but this is all it is! Nag, nag, nag!" (C, 329-330). The clones's reaction is startling, and perhaps emblematic:

They allowed Joanna May no authority: she had disclaimed mother, she must take the consequences: they would not even accept her status as originator. They looked her up and down, inspected her, now their equal, their equivalent, but somehow dusty with it. So that was what the passage of the years did -- it made you dusty. They resolved never to wear black. It did not suit them. They were in a manic state. As for Joanna, she wanted their pity, all of a sudden, their acknowledgement of her wrongs, but they'd allow her none of that. An easy life, a quiet life! Married for thirty years! To Carl May, the famous Carl! They had all been wronged, more than she, each one claimed (C, 330).

Without the authority of motherhood, offered and claimed in whatever odd way, therefore, the older woman has no authority at all. The daughters -- or younger generation -- examine her and find her lacking. She has contributed nothing and deserves no recognition, either for her "status as originator" or for her own sufferings. Here, the problems created by the lack of models other than that of the mother-daughter relationship for interaction, cooperation and learning between and

from women are made glaringly obvious.¹⁰ However, the clones' and Joanna's "sisterhood" does survive, after Joanna has attempted to leave, once she has consented to be their chairperson, "someone who controlled an agenda but couldn't vote" (C, 331). In spite of these problems of authority and of mother-daughter relations, however, it is still her discovery and acknowledgement of the clones that enables Joanna May finally to name herself as "perhaps now, just Joanna" (C, 326). She is finally no longer encompassed by her identity as Carl's wife, but discovers in the "fear... shame... rage... desire, and a great swelling energy" (C, 324) of meeting the clones that she

was part of a living landscape, and the function of that life was to worship and laud its maker, and the maker was not Carl May: he had not made me: wife I might be, but only part of me, for all of a sudden there was more of me left (C, 324).

This is probably the most positive and triumphant statement of female certainty via a new -- but still particularly feminine -- identity to be found in all of Weldon's work.

The revision of not just past and present, but also future identity, is also gestured towards at the end of *The Cloning of Joanna May*. Joanna May creates, with the help of the other clones, a "little Carl" (C, 347), using Dr Holly's assistance with his "tried and tested techniques of nuclei transfer" (C, 348). Now that Joanna May has learned much about the meanings of motherhood, she becomes mother to what a reviewer, in obvious disgust, calls Carl's "ex-wife's quasi-grandchild" (Craig,

¹⁰ Even feminist discourse might be said to be in this "manic state" brought about by an absence of models for women to learn from each other in ways which do not become swallowed up by either the mother's nagging criticism of the daughter's difference or the daughter's utter rejection of the mother's authority and valuable experience. See Gallop's essay "History is Like Mother" (1992, 206-239) for further comment on this point.

1989, 518). Joanna says that she cannot allow the little Carl to be held responsible for Carl May's deeds, because

this innocent has done nothing: I know he could, that's all, and knowing what he could do also know what I could do, sufficiently provoked; and so I have to forgive him, both in retrospect and in advance (C, 348).

She also places her faith in the future, which she says "shouldn't alarm us: how could it be worse than what's gone before...? It is the past that is so terrifying, with its capacity to spoil and destroy the present" (C, 347).

This remark is an almost exact replica of one of Weldon's own recent statements, in which she says, "[w]e can't be frightened of the future, I say: it's the past that destroys us" (1994a, 197). This view follows on from Weldon's refusal to adhere to more conventional feminist judgements in terms of reproductive technology, which she sees as attempts to validate only "natural" pregnancy and birth processes. Weldon has always been deeply suspicious of this view, saying, "I have always seen 'nature' as inimical to women; nature kills you" (1994a, 196). In *The Cloning of Joanna May*, the clones "exchange" their responsibilities regarding children as they please: Alice gives birth to "little Carl," (C, 347) then happily gives the baby to Joanna when he is six weeks old; Julie adopts Gina's two sons, and Jane and her erstwhile "live-out" (C, 10) but now live-in lover, Tom, look after Sue, Gina's daughter. Joanna says that "[w]e've had so many oughts and shoulds, all of us, we've all but given up being critical of one another" (C, 350), and the clones are given the advantage, says the narrator elsewhere, of feeling "the inherent guilt of the female, but not powerfully; being four that guilt was quartered. The soul was multiplied, the guilt divided. That was a great advance" (C, 310-11). Importantly, also, this division of guilt is explicitly linked with the clones' discovery of one

another, with their sisterhood. Jane's acceptance of Tom is a useful example: she is unable to allow either him or herself to be happy in the early stages of the novel, but once she has met the other clones she can allow him to move in with her, since she is now "running comfortably on only a quarter guilt" (C, 349).

Finally, it is useful to note that *The Cloning of Joanna May* inhabits both a fairly conventionally realist mode and also a kind of allegorical one. In other words, it exists in both a political and in an almost mythical dimension. This mythical dimension is suggested by Weldon's use of the Tarot pack to add a symbolic aspect to the novel's workings, but it also exists, I would argue, in the notion that the story could be that of a metaphorical exploration of one woman's -- Joanna May's -- identity. In this scenario, the clones each function as one aspect of Joanna's personality: Jane as intellect (Queen of Wands), Julie as strength derived from the material world (Queen of Pentacles), Gina as endurance (Queen of Swords) and Alice as aesthetic and moral perception (Queen of Cups). According to the Tarot reading given of Joanna by Isaac, then, the novel contains the story of her journey from the simply intellectual to a more advanced state of aesthetic and moral perception, via her endurance and understanding of the material world. It is entirely appropriate to this reading of the novel that it is Alice, who symbolises this "advanced" state, who gives birth to "little Carl". The child is thus, in this reading, the product of Joanna's developed identity, and the story functions as a kind of female creation myth, whereby the woman experiences trials and hardship in order to produce some kind of new order of life, of which she is the author.

However, while interesting, this argument tends to lead back into notions of clear and singular authorship which are rendered highly problematic by other parts

of the novel. The fantasy of the single and all-knowing creator is held by Carl May, and is both phallogocentric, as I have shown, and ultimately destructive. Thus, to replace the idea of the male creator with a female one does nothing to displace the problem of phallogocentrism. It simply replaces the male ideal of "culture" with the female one of "nature", doing nothing to problematise the workings of the system of hierarchy itself. The imperfection and multiplicity of the clones, together with the fact that they neither purposefully destroy Carl May, nor try in their re-production of him to genetically organise and perfect him, constitutes their creative project as something different from those of phallogocentrism. Crucially, it is forgiving of faults or potential faults -- abandoning "oughts and shoulds" (C, 350) -- as I have shown above. The acknowledgement of difference and imperfection here means that the novel cannot be simply read as the takeover by women of the means of reproduction. It is not simplistically advocating that women are and should remain the producers of children, that mothers are better mothers than fathers are, but is shifting the process of re-production itself away from notions of both "naturalness" and the scientific production of "perfect" children.

With regard to Irigaray's concerns in the epigraphs to this chapter, then, *The Cloning of Joanna May* explores and alters accepted notions of motherhood (and daughterhood, and sisterhood). However, it does so without either "kill[ing] the mother" (Irigaray, 1991, 43) or reinstating the patriarchal myth of Mother as all that is good, bad, and above all "natural". By doing so, Weldon enables the clones to make sense of their origin and status, their position as "'products' used and exchanged by men" (Irigaray, 1985b, 84), and thus to "quarter their guilt" and enable them to participate in processes of exchange and speech on their own terms.

Crucial to this is the recognition of both their "sameness" (Gallop, 1982, 74) and their multiplicity, their difference:

We would have been perfect people if we could, but our genes were against us. We would have been faithful, kind and true, but fate was against us. We are one woman split five ways, a hundred ways, a million million ways (C, 350).

A note on Weldon's style, the "female voice", and *écriture féminine*

"Thus, although women can write, they must not write angrily" (Russ, 1983, 95).

"As Weldon's concerns get larger, her style seems to go to pot" (Craig, 1989, 518).

"...women's comedy borrows clichés only to undercut them..." (Barreca, 1994c, 181).

Although the first collection of academic, critical essays dealing with Fay Weldon's work has just been published,¹ the evaluation of her work has, until now, been contained almost exclusively within reviews written by mainstream literary critics.² Reviews of her work in publications such as *The Times Literary Supplement* and the *New York Review of Books* have been common since the early 1980s. These reviews have also become increasingly impatient and disapproving in their tone, and have frequently focussed their negative assessments on Weldon's style. Given this fact, and the somewhat vexed question of style or "voice" in feminist literary theory, it seems worthwhile to spend some time examining Weldon's style fairly closely.

The origins of Weldon's style might be found, on a very practical (or materialist) level, in her years as an advertising copywriter. She has stated in an interview that what advertising gives the writer is "a sense of power" (1985a, 315). This accords well with Weldon's sense of purpose, the fact that she states that she

¹ Regina Barreca (ed) 1994 *Fay Weldon's Wicked Fictions*. Hanover, University Press of New England.

² Other work on Weldon can be found in rare journal articles, chapters in books dealing with contemporary English novelists, and in unpublished theses. See my bibliography for further details of these.

is "quite frequently moved [to write] by a sense of outrage and indignation, otherwise I wouldn't do it in the first place" (1985a, 316). Almost all Weldon's writing possesses this sense of urgency. She comments further in terms of her purpose in writing:

Style seems to me in the end a matter of economy, of how to get down rapidly and exactly, with precision, what you wish to say. If you have enough to say, you want to get it down as quickly as possible, and this is what develops an individual style (1985a, 320).

This statement is all about emphasis, about speaking out and having one's say. Weldon's writing, according to this statement of intent, might thus be said to focus primarily on plot. However, a closer look at Weldon's style reveals that the thesis that her writing subordinates form to content may not be entirely correct.

Starlady Sandra, the astronomer protagonist of Weldon's 1988 novel, *Leader of the Band* (London, Coronet), has this to say about the cosmos:

Form, style, content - in that order of importance. The cosmos is composed of intricate patterns which contain the key to its purpose. That is what I mean by *form*. The cosmos also has a certain *style* which can be recognised and predicted. We can, by observing the particular style of our own galaxy, project ahead our own discoveries: that is to say, know what we are looking for before we find it. (Neighbouring galaxies have different styles, which we do not yet understand, but presently will.) *Content*, mere stars, planets, black holes, and so forth, are the mere stuff of the universe: pawns moved here and there to demonstrate form and style. Content is last and least (8).

Sandra's words, ostensibly about the workings of the heavens, might well be applied to the practice of writing, or even be said to contain something of the feminist project. Both writers and feminists, for example, seem to know something of "what we are looking for before we find it", or be able to suggest new possibilities in terms of content via their manipulation of style. It is intriguing that Sandra, who is one of Weldon's most intelligent, independent and scandalous heroines, should so

thoroughly dismiss the importance of content, while Weldon herself apparently accords it so much power and importance. Perhaps, in the light of Sandra's comments, it might be important to look more carefully at Weldon's brief comments about form and style. An assessment of Weldon's work which gives attention only to her content might be missing both the "intricate patterns which contain the key to its purpose" and new ways in which we might "project ahead our own discoveries". In other words, what Starlady Sandra refers to as form and style might be more important to an exploration of Weldon's work than they may at first seem. Again in terms of the influence of her advertising training, Weldon says that

[d]esigners and typographers actually teach you the look upon the page. Words are given resonance by their positions, they must be displayed properly. If you wish to give something emphasis, you surround it by space (1985a, 320).

The result is a style which frequently consists of "stanzaic intervals" which "have the effect of breaking up the prosaic continuity of narrative cause-and-effect into moments of acute perception and aphoristic reflection" (Salzmann-Brunner, 1988, 184). As Brigitte Salzmann-Brunner notes, one of the notable effects of this is the didactic impact which is exerted, which accords of course with Weldon's aforementioned "sense of purpose". Other critics have noted other effects: Francis King, for example, states that

[i]n preferring this kind of patchwork to a seamless robe, [Weldon] seems to have taken to heart Camus's remark 'We communicate in communiqués'. Smoothness is sacrificed; but there is the compensatory gain of the kind of dramatic tension that can be produced by expert cutting on the screen (quoted in Kossick, 1989, 30).

Salzmann-Brunner, in other words, notes a poetic quality, while King links Weldon's style with effects more usually found in filmed narrative. The disruptive, powerful

status of Weldon's use of form is thus emphasised via different types of comparison.

Weldon's remarks about "the look upon the page" (1985a, 320) and creating emphasis by positioning words in particular ways within a text might be seen as part of a unique formal organisation. With regard to the relationship between literary form and the question of identity, Alice Jardine remarks that

[d]isturbances in the syntactic chain -- the insurgence of rhythm and intonation into the ranks of grammatical categories for example -- may be seen as an attack against the ultimate guarantor of our identity. As Kristeva puts it, it is the mark of a reevaluation process threatening the subject's unity (1981, 234).

This is the kind of conceptual viewpoint which has led to the valorisation of particular kinds of writing as more expressive of the problematic of identity faced by women. Hélène Cixous, for example, has identified a particular kind of writing -- which has come to be known as *écriture féminine* -- with the possibility of expressing female identity in new ways. This "feminine" writing can, for Cixous and also for Julia Kristeva, be found in the work of both male (Mallarmé, Lautréamont, Artaud, Kleist) and female (Clarice Lispector) writers (Whitford, 1991b, 50). This type of writing is also used by Cixous herself, by Kristeva on occasion,³ and is "attempted" by Jacques Derrida.⁴ It is, broadly speaking, an attempt to speak the body, to write as or like a woman. Leaving aside for a moment the question of the difference between writing "as" and/or "like" a woman, it also immediately becomes apparent that it is a certain type of writing -- very literate, very much identified with "high

³ For example, in her article on pregnancy and childbirth entitled "Stabat Mater" (1985 [1977]).

⁴ See Whitford (1991b) pp 38-52.

culture", which is operative here.⁵ I would argue that Weldon's particular use of form, whilst not poetically or syntactically disruptive in quite the ways of (particularly French) *écriture féminine*, contains another kind of disruption in the way it tries to give words "resonance by their positions," by attempting to "display [them] properly" (Weldon, 1985a, 320). Weldon's attack on patriarchal language might thus be said to come, at least in part, from her very visual awareness of the way words, sentences and paragraphs look on the page.

In *Remember Me* (1976), for example, Weldon uses direct narratorial address, followed rapidly by interior monologue -- indicated with careful paragraphing and indentation -- and then by the narrator conducting a sort of question-and-answer session with herself (or with a projection of the reader), in which questions and answers are each a separate, lone sentence. She also makes use of a list of advantages of a new job for a character, with each benefit italicised and followed by a brief paragraph of explanation, as if in a marketing document. Dialogue is sometimes presented in the form of a play or screenplay, apparently eliminating the narrator's presence and presenting characters' speech to one another "verbatim". This may again be the result of Weldon's practical experience as a writer: she has written numerous plays for stage, television screen and radio, and has also produced screenplays. Thus, one might argue with Shirley Kossick that "[r]egular shifts from the drama to the novel have had a marked

⁵ Although this perception of *écriture féminine* may, in turn, be more the result of the manner in which it has been dealt with by Anglo-American feminist theory: Jane Gallop has recently written of its origins that "the strategy of *écriture féminine* was in fact to claim high vanguard culture (postmodern *écriture*) for the ordinary woman, to associate it with what in women was most 'common,' the body" (1992, 46).

influence on Weldon's prose style which... is pared down to essentials" (1989, 30).

To return to my detailing of the stylistic devices used in *Remember Me*, then, important statements, jokes, and instructions from narrator to reader are all indicated as such by being placed in very short paragraphs, sometimes as short as only a word or exclamation. And as Kossick adds, "[d]escriptive passages are kept to a minimum and introduced only when they directly serve narrative and characterization" (1989, 30). All in all, the conventions of novel-writing, while not radically broken with, are certainly adapted in particular ways and infused with a carefully thought-out disruption. This formal organisation, which has at least part of its roots in Weldon's copywriting experience, might also be said to contain something of advertising's language of seduction. The coercive and pleasurably persuasive aspects of this language can, furthermore, be read as an extension of Weldon's dark humour, and of her parodic relationship with the popular, or with "low culture".⁶

Weldon's particular "respect for form" (Jardine, 1981, 232) is thus a complicated aspect of her writing. She does, on the one hand, seem to have less interest in the formal disruption required in order to be classified as writing *écriture féminine*, and explicitly declares her affiliation to a particular (primarily English) tradition of writing in *Letters to Alice on first reading Jane Austen* (1984).⁷ In the

⁶ Weldon's use of humour and relations with aspects of popular writing and culture are discussed in further detail below.

⁷ Another example of Weldon's particularly English literary affiliation also makes up part of her experimentation with forms, and use of popular forms in her writing. This is her serially-produced novel *The Hearts and Lives of Men* (1987), which was "written in 46 weekly instalments (for *Woman* magazine)" (Kossick, 1989, 32), before being published in book form.

latter text, Weldon uses a form which has been an important one for women writers: the epistolary novel. In her particular version of it, however, the form is used partly to create a fictional story, but also to convey various apparently directly expressed opinions regarding women, literature, and the practice of writing fiction. Each letter has a specific title, as if it were a conventional chapter rather than a letter, which conveys the essence of the letter's content or directs the reader to its main point.

This type of "directive" chapter title is a widely used device, and appears in *Puffball* (1980) and *The Heart of the Country* (1987). In the latter text, in addition to this, the use of narratorial presence is confused or disrupted. I will be looking at this aspect of Weldon's work in more detail in the forthcoming chapters on *The President's Child* (1982) and *Growing Rich* (1992). However, it should be noted for my purposes here, with regard to *The Heart of the Country*, that Sonia, the "madwoman" narrator of much of the novel's events, becomes, at times, virtually indistinguishable from the more "intrusive" or conventionally "Weldonesque" narrator, who dispenses insight, advice and commentary on the events of almost every Weldon novel and short story. This blending or merging of the voice of the novel's "madwoman" and the voice of the experienced, rational narrator might also be said to comprise a kind of answer to critical views that Weldon's third-person narrator is too didactic and omniscient. In other words, Paul Johnson's assertion that this narrator is "a mine of misinformation" (quoted in Kossick, 1989, 32) might well be correct, but this disruption of narrative presence need not be interpreted as either accidental or as quite the kind of "problem" which Johnson and others imply it is.

Another stylistic or formal device used by Weldon is that of the refrain or

chorus, particularly noteworthy in *The Cloning of Joanna May* (1989), in which the phrase “I, Joanna May” (126, 134, 157, 179, 259, 264, 323, 326, 350) and the linked names of the clones – “Jane, Julie, Gina, Alice” (14, 121, 205, 276, 288, 294, 333) – are repeated over and over again, thus acquiring the status of defining phrases in terms of the novel’s focus on female identity.⁸ In this novel, Weldon also expands her effort to “display” words and paragraphs “effectively” by making use of section dividers (as well as new paragraphs or numbered chapters) within the chapters which are concerned with the clones.⁹ This is a stylistic device which “unites” the clones within a chapter, but simultaneously shows them existing separately – ultimately reinforcing the text’s complex point (on the level of content) that they are both divided and united.

Weldon’s use of a kind of formal or generic mixing and amalgamation, as well as her use and adaptation of particular stylistic devices does, therefore, comprise a particular type of disruptive use of form, which must affect or even alter the ways in which her content is read. The reviewer whose comment on *The Cloning of Joanna May* (1989) heads this chapter does not see any merit in Weldon’s particular use of form and style, but a different perspective (such as Starlady Sandra’s or my own, for example) might well see it as intriguing and useful.

I have not mentioned Luce Irigaray thus far in this brief note on *écriture*

⁸ A similar device, slightly modified in content, is used in *The President’s Child* (1982) and will be discussed in the chapter dealing with this novel. The refrain is also used in one of Weldon’s early novels, *Down Among the Women* (1971), in which the title itself is used as an oft-repeated chorus.

⁹ See chapters 2 (pp 10-14), 11 (pp 63-75), 17 (pp 105-121), 33 (pp 205-211), 35 and 36 (pp 218-237) and 43 to 46 (pp 276-297).

féminine and its possible relation to Weldon's writing, mainly because I think that her version of this concept differs in crucial ways from the versions of Kristeva, Cixous, Derrida and others. Irigaray's insights on this topic lead back to the difference (mentioned above) between writing "as" and writing "like" a woman. Irigaray's term for women's writing (or *écriture féminine*) is "*parler-femme*". This term refers both to "'feminine' language" and comprises "a pun on *par les femmes* (by women)" (Whitford, 1991b, 49). Margaret Whitford explains how important it is that the pun is retained, resulting in the use of the English translation "speaking (as) woman": because "to speak as a woman implies not only psychosexual positioning, but also social positioning" (Whitford, 1991b, 49). Irigaray is attempting to open up a space for *woman as subject*, and her more recent work places increasing emphasis on this, rather than on *parler-femme*. This is a result of her insistence (again, as explained by Whitford) that

occupying the subject-position is not simply a question of the position of enunciation, it must be rooted in social practices too – part of the definition of woman-as-subject is that women must be involved in the construction of the world and the making of culture and sociopolitical reality (1991b, 50-51).

This point should, I think, be borne in mind whenever the concepts of *parler-femme* or the creation of a different "grammar" or "syntax" of culture, as Irigaray puts it, are used.¹⁰ Weldon's own broadly stated objective – "[o]ne wishes women to join the human race" (1985a, 313) – is remarkably close to Irigaray's, if slightly less theoretically honed. The increasingly obvious similarities between their projects is the reason, as noted in the introduction, for this thesis' extensive use of particular

¹⁰ See Irigaray's essays "Questions" and "The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine" in *This Sex Which is Not One* (1985b), and Whitford (1991b) pp 29-52.

aspects of Irigaray's work as potentially illuminatory of Weldon's.¹¹

Weldon's use of humour is frequently remarked on. She has commented on her jokes in articles and interviews, saying "I use humour because I'm weak-minded and always in a hurry" (Weldon, 1988b, 310-11), that it is useful to her since "humour is a kind of punctuation because you can say in one sentence what would otherwise take a page" (quoted in Kenyon, 1988, 108). Weldon's jokes often take the form of single-line, simultaneously funny and devastating statements, for which she is renowned.¹² Regina Barreca refers to this as "a particularly *lethal* form of deadpan humour" (1994c, 173, my emphasis). The violent aspect of this humour is made clear here, and Weldon shows her own awareness of the links between jokes and "pain" (1988b, 310) elsewhere. Barreca quotes Weldon as saying that "it would not be fair to make people feel safe when safety is, in fact, an illusion" (1994c, 173), thus emphasising Weldon's very strategic use of humour. As Weldon herself is well aware, "humour allows the reader to feel pleasure even as something important is being passed on to them" (quoted in Barreca, 1994c, 173). Of course, it is not every reader, or even every female reader, who finds Weldon's writing both amusing and

¹¹ As I noted in the introduction to this thesis, Irigaray and Weldon's writing styles are also similar. Commenting on Irigaray's use of form and style in their "Translators' Note" to *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, for example, Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill state that "because typography and format are such significant aspects of the Irigarayan text, we have sought not to standardize idiosyncratic usage but rather to respect her deliberate deviation from editorial norms wherever possible. Thus... extra spacing is often used to mark pauses for reflection, stages in the unfolding of the argument, or parallelisms in the marshalling of arguments in support of a thesis" (Irigaray, 1993a, viii).

¹² Siân Mile explains the effects of these one-liners as follows: "[n]ot only is the moment cynical and funny, but it is also noisy -- the space that follows [the line] is filled with the noise of Weldon's intransigence..., but also with the sound of the response demanded from the reader" (1994, 31).

educative. Many readers respond, I would contend, with their own anger, pain, and rejection. Thus, the frequently outraged response of reviewers -- a response which also has a lot to do with the restriction on women's writing referred to by Joanna Russ in my first epigraph above.

Barreca summarises this aspect of Weldon's writing when she says that "[c]omedy and power are interlocked in Weldon's writing: the power of comedy is to undo expectations and revise women's view of themselves in the system" (1994c, 182). Weldon's use of humour is thus really rather serious. Joking again, she asserts that "[f]eminists get accused of not being able to make jokes. I don't think it's an accusation, either. I think it's a compliment" (1988b, 310). In spite of a fear that her use of humour leads to a tendency "to trivialize everything," and thus to attempts to eliminate "funny lines" because "you get taken more seriously if you do" (Weldon, 1985a, 317) -- or is she joking here too? -- Weldon's use of humour is both important in terms of her feminism, and, judging by the strength of the reactions to her work, taken very seriously indeed. The often quoted words of Ruth, heroine of *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* (1983), serve as an apt summary: "I am a lady of six feet two, who had tucks taken in her legs. A comic turn, turned serious" (240).

Weldon has become increasingly involved with what might be called a particularly controversial kind of feminist position. It allows her to write for, and be part of the editorial staff of, US beauty magazine *Allure*, to tell British *Vogue* what her favourite kind of skin cream is,¹³ and to write articles renouncing her previous

¹³ "Advanced Night Repair and a new one, Fruition, both by Estée Lauder. They work -- I noticed a difference straightaway" (*Vogue*, London: Condé Nast, October 1993: 237).

position regarding women's weight,¹⁴ proclaiming that "[f]at is depression. Fat is wanting minor pleasure now instead of major pleasure later" (1995, 22). This position seems, on one level, to be an outright rejection of the feminist principles Weldon once espoused, a resigned acceptance of the patriarchal status quo which might also be said to be present in her more recent novels. However, I would assert that this is not the case at all. Instead, keeping my third epigraph -- about "borrowing clichés to undercut them" -- in mind, Weldon's links with Irigaray become clearer.

Referring again to a recent interview with Weldon, Barreca states that she "insists that the possibilities for overturning the system lie not in political revolutions but in revising the entire concept of power and construction" (1994c, 182). In this she is remarkably close to Irigaray, who supports almost every aspect of women's struggles, yet is reluctant to be called a feminist because the term itself, she argues, is inadequate to the task of expressing the immense complexity of change needed in culture in order to alter women's position. Her solution to the problem is this:

There is, in an initial phase, perhaps only one 'path,' the one historically assigned to the feminine: that of *mimicry*. One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it. Whereas a direct feminine challenge to this condition means demanding to speak as a (masculine) 'subject,'... To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it (Irigaray, 1985b, 76).

This deliberate taking on of "the feminine role" is, in Irigarayan terms, both strategic

¹⁴ To be found in her first novel, *The Fat Woman's Joke* (1967).

and temporary.¹⁵ She is not speaking about either a biologically or a culturally essential femininity, but is recommending mimesis as a way to avoid “elaborating a new theory of which woman would be the *subject* or the *object*” by using one’s writing (for example) as a way of “jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretension to the production of a truth and a meaning that are necessarily univocal” (1985a, 78). What she is attempting to find is

the possibility of the ‘way out’ from our current system of gender identity in which ‘her’ specificity opens up the unknown, in which sexual difference would not be re-appropriated. Through Irigaray’s *mimesis*, we move within what has been prefigured so as to continually transfigure it (Cornell, 1991, 169).

And this, I would argue, is precisely what much of Weldon’s writing does, particularly (although not exclusively) her work since 1980 and *Puffball*. In text after text, Weldon’s narrators and characters take on traditional feminine roles and experiences, and explore these thoroughly from an Irigarayan perspective. Suspicion of anything resembling a norm about what childbirth, or pregnancy, or love, or sisterhood, or feminism, or nature is meant to be like leads Weldon’s narrators and protagonists to their own visions of the world and their place within it. As Irigaray emphasises, the practice of mimesis is not a simple or easy one, and is - as I have tried to show in the chapters on *Puffball* and *The Cloning of Joanna May*, and will continue to emphasise in forthcoming chapters on *The President’s Child* and *Growing Rich* -- fraught with problems and contradictions, particularly with regard to the critical reception and assessment of Weldon’s work. I have tried to focus on

¹⁵ Recent theorists of colonial discourse have also explored the concept of mimicry at length. Homi Bhabha, for example, defines “that form of difference that is mimicry” as that which is “*almost the same but not quite*” (1985, 130, emphasis in original).

what I think is a process of mimesis at work in Weldon's writing, and have explored instances of contradiction or ambivalence in order to discover what is at stake within such moments, from the point of view of a particular type of ("Irigarayan"? "Weldonesque"?) feminist criticism.

Apart from this perspective, I will also be placing emphasis on Weldon's use of narrators in the following chapters. Another important aspect of recent feminist theory is the attention given to the bodies in which textual voices are "wrapped". In order to explore female identity from this angle, the portrayals of the bodies of Isabel (the protagonist) and Maia (the narrator) in *The President's Child*, and Carmen (the central protagonist) and Hattie Upton (the narrator) in *Growing Rich*, will be the primary foci of the forthcoming explorations of these texts.

Growing Rich: body, narrative, identity

"It goes without saying that the body, whether masculine or feminine, is imbricated in the matrices of power at all levels, and not just, or even primarily, on the level of theory; but the feminine body, as the prime site of sexual and/or racial difference in a white, masculine, western political and sexual economy, is peculiarly the battlefield on which quite other struggles than women's own have been waged" (Jacobus et al, 1990, 2).

"Apparently, Raelene said, Marks & Spencer affirmed that the female body altered to suit fashion. Bodies, in fact, grew into what society desired them to be.

'So?' asked Carmen.

'So well I don't know,' said Raelene. 'But life is full of surprises.'" (*Growing Rich*, hereafter *GR*, 80).

The notion that bodies are always involved in, and affected by, all kinds of power relations is one which, it seems, needs to be constantly emphasised and repeated. Thus, for example, Mary Jacobus, Evelyn Fox Keller and Sally Shuttleworth insist on it in the epigraph to this chapter, while simultaneously remarking that such an idea really "goes without saying". If the idea does indeed not need restating, why do so? The answer may be in the particularly feminist slant which these three editors -- of and in a volume entitled *Body/Politics. Women and the Discourses of Science* -- place on it. For it is not just "the body" which they -- and I -- wish to speak about, but the female body.¹ And, as they further emphasise, women's bodies are not their own, but have been -- and are being -- used as the

¹ Jacobus, Fox Keller and Shuttleworth make use of the phrase "feminine body" rather than "female body" in the introduction to *Body/Politics*, although they do use "female body", apparently interchangeably, on a few occasions. As I see it, the distinction between the two phrases, whereby "feminine" is used to signify cultural, social and political constructedness and "female" something more like a bedrock on which to rest new (feminist) notions of femininity, while it has a distinct and important history within feminist theory, is not a valid or useful one. I will therefore use the term "female body" to indicate the -- always already constructed -- body sexed as female in western culture.

“battlefield on which quite other struggles than women’s own” are contested. To counteract this, and simultaneously to try to make sense and meaning of the female body from a feminist perspective, it is necessary to pay close attention to the ways in which this body is produced “as hysterical (or maternal, or fat) at different times and in different places” (Jacobus et al, 1990, 8) by various representations of that body. In this chapter, I will explore the ways in which the female characters of *Growing Rich* (1992) -- with a central focus on Hattie Upton and Carmen -- experience their constantly changing bodies. Also important is the manner in which Carmen’s body functions as a kind of indicator of the contest between the forces of good and evil, male and female power, and the interaction between the sociopolitical narrative and the allegorical or non-realist narrative modes at work in the novel.

Growing Rich presents its narrator, Hattie Upton, who is paralysed, telling the story of three young women -- Carmen, Laura and Annie -- trying to get out of Fenedge, the town in East Anglia in which they have grown up and which is described as “Dullsville, Somewhere-Near-The-Sea” (*GR*, 5). All three have mothers whose (bodily and otherwise) influences on their daughters are major. Other women, particularly Mrs Baker (the three girls’ teacher), “Poison Poppy” (who personifies young female evil, in fairytale style), Alison (Hattie’s indomitable, elderly “voluntary carer” [*GR*, 41]) and even Mrs Haverill (malevolent, elderly manageress of the Bellamy House hotel) also have important roles to play in the plot.

✱ Of these female characters, almost all of them -- and certainly the three sets of mothers and daughters -- experience their bodies and their sexuality as disruptive, unnerving and uncanny. Their bodies express their repressed emotions,

fears and desires in spite of their own and others' attempts to control them. While Laura, for example, takes refuge (like so many other contemporary female characters, including Mabs in Weldon's novel *Puffball*) in motherhood and the processes of pregnancy and childbirth, thus simply becoming the mother-figure which society does accept rather than the ambitious young woman it cannot, her mother Audrey is abandoned by her father. Audrey, earlier described as someone "who often talked like the back page of a woman's magazine" (GR, 13) and "ran a one-woman rescue service for the benefit of her neighbours' children" (GR, 18), becomes very ill. The stomach pain which she imagines is caused by indigestion, in its turn caused by "worry over her husband Kim's whereabouts... born of the guilt of once having been the other woman" (GR, 18), turns out to be the pain of stomach cancer. Here the novel makes one of its explicitly sociopolitical points, since Audrey's pain has also been diagnosed by the local doctor as being "not functional but neurotic,... in itself... a contributory cause for Kim leaving home" (GR, 36). The doctor's reluctance to diagnose pathological causes for his patients' illnesses is also commented on by Hattie, who says that Dr Grafton implies by his actions that it is she who is to blame for her inability to walk. The criticism here might be seen as twofold: of both the doctor's refusal to take seriously his (particularly female) patients' illnesses, and of his conservative use of a certain type of psychoanalytic discourse, which enables him to dismiss these illnesses as the fault of the patients themselves (thereby also absolving himself of any responsibility towards them).

The ambivalent status of psychoanalysis in terms of its relationship to women and to feminism is hinted at here. On the one hand, the discourse of psychoanalysis is potentially liberatory for women and useful to feminist theory and

analysis. On the other hand, however, it may be used as part of the power of a conservative medical establishment, and work decisively against the interests -- and the bodily and mental health -- of women. Whilst the insights provided by psychoanalysis are extremely valuable ones, it also contains the potential to be primarily a discourse of containment, as Luce Irigaray and many other feminist theorists have shown. As Jane Gallop says, "Irigaray calls for a new sort of psychoanalytic writing, one in which the analyst's mastery is undercut by the recognition that the analyst too has an unconscious which traverses the analytic scene" (1982, 102). This is the kind of "scene" which is conveyed via the narrative structure of *Growing Rich*. The narrator, Hattie Upton, who also provides her own commentary on and explanations of events in the story she relates, is in the position of the analyst. Essentially, she is the one with power and mastery, able to see into the thoughts and motivations of others and explain these to a third party (in this case, the reader) in the form of a narrative. However, Hattie is also an extremely self-aware narrator, and is explicitly concerned with the way her own motivations (which are also frequently, to her frustration, veiled to her) influence her telling of the story. Her physical status -- as a paraplegic who is immobile and thus often removed from the scenes she describes in such careful detail -- adds to the process of revision of the position of the masterful analyst/narrator by the text. It might thus be argued that *Growing Rich* itself is an instance of the kind of writing which Irigaray and Gallop describe. In order to do show how this is done, therefore, I will explore the ways in which the links between the authority conferred on her by the process of writing the story and Hattie's own body appear in the novel.

At the start of *Growing Rich*, explaining who she is, Hattie tells the reader why

she is relating the story of Carmen, Annie and Laura: she has watched them grow up, watched "the ambulances turn into Landsfield Crescent to take their labouring mothers to hospital, watched them return, one, two, three" (*GR*, 7). She says that she "blessed them in my mind,... as if I were the Fairy Godmother" (*GR*, 7), and then acknowledges her own investment in their lives, since she has no real life of her own. Hattie says that she has "developed the art of seeing through walls, overhearing what could not be heard" so as to be aware of the three girls' development, then acknowledges that

I have nothing else to do but develop these arts. Sometimes I get taken out by my social worker, or friends; mostly I just sit here at the window and wait for Carmen, Annie and Laura to pass and wave and reanimate with their actual presence their continuing story in my mind. When you think you can see through your neighbours' walls what is fact and what is fiction is hard to distinguish (*GR*, 7).

And, as soon as she has invoked the image of herself as "Fairy Godmother", she wonders about what kind of fairy she is: perhaps, she says guiltily, it is her own desire to have something happen "just to liven things up a little" (*GR*, 8) which controls Carmen, Annie and Laura's lives and introduces the presence of Driver among them. Perhaps she is "a Bad Fairy, after all, not in the least Good" (*GR*, 8).

The use of capital letters emphasises Hattie's awareness of the archetypal status of the possibilities open to her, but a third position is then created which hovers between the binary opposition that presents itself here. In the short paragraph which follows the one detailing her identity as either "Good" or "Bad", Hattie deconstructs the scene still further. She confuses the status of her narrative as purely something she invents in her own mind, for her own entertainment, by saying

[b]ut then I remember that a sense of omnipotence can be a symptom of mental illness, and put the notion from my mind. I live in fear of going mad, just to add to my other troubles (GR, 8).

She is not, then, either a Good Fairy or a Bad one, since she is not completely in control. Hattie acknowledges her own power in terms of the narrative, and likewise acknowledges her own desire for narrative, but she also refuses the idea -- because it is a dangerous one -- that her narrative is the entirely self-conscious product of her own imagination. She thus constructs a speaking position from which she relates both her own bodily experiences, and the stories of Carmen, Annie and Laura's experiences, without either denying her position as narrator or inhabiting it in the "knowing" but still controlling manner which is implied by the positioning of the "Bad Fairy", who knows about her omnipotence but actually uses the acknowledgement of it to further enhance her power. In other words, then, the treatment of narration in *Growing Rich* exposes and explores the powerful position of the analyst/narrator by taking seriously what Gallop describes as "... the difficulty of feminist writing, the difficulty of keeping infidelity from becoming fidelity to a system of infidelity" (1982, 51).² The feminist writer needs to avoid a simplistic deconstruction of the position of analyst/narrator, as Weldon has done in *Growing Rich*, where she has instead produced a narrator who is placed in a position of

² Much of Gallop's argument in her two books, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction* (1982) and *Thinking Through the Body* (1988) is concerned with points related to this one. In the latter text, regarding the concept of jouissance, for example, she says that "[i]f jouissance is celebrated as something that unsettles assumptions, it becomes ineffective when it itself settles into an assumption" (123). She is once again arguing that an apparently disruptive device is no longer disruptive when it becomes conventional, and I would argue that it is also not disruptive when the device (as used by the narrator herself) pays no attention to the desires and impulses at work behind its use.

ambivalence and even confusion. Sometimes, Hattie inhabits the position of all-powerful narrator, and at other times, exposes the desires and motivations of this narrator. However, as her "fear of going mad" reveals, the latter position is in turn determined by a desire to renounce the authority which it also contains, although this authority is less apparent than that of the unproblematically omniscient narrator.

The sources of Hattie's various kinds of knowledge are also foregrounded in the text. Her information usually comes from books donated to the Handicapped Centre (or Otherly Abled Resource Centre, as it is later renamed) in Fenedge, where she is compelled to spend quite a lot of time. Thus, she speaks of "the remaindered volumes of *Flora & Fauna Around the World*" (GR, 102), from which comes considerable detail regarding the landscape of New Zealand. The mention of these books simultaneously explains the extensive knowledge of the East Anglian landscape around Fenedge which Hattie has displayed up to this point in the novel. A much-used device is that of descriptions of the landscape which include the Latin names of plants, birds and animals. Thus, describing renovations at Bellamy House, Hattie says that the tractors "made one mass, one mess, of a thousand different things, from the heath spotted orchid (*Dactylorhiza maculata*) to the dewberry to the dog rose to the *Digitalis purpurea* (or foxglove)..." (GR, 51). After another set of comments regarding nature and its destruction in the name of "progress", she explains that "([w]e've had a further batch of reference books turn up at the Handicapped Centre: these ones are all stamped 'Conservation Library'...)" (GR, 116). Hattie also makes use of unconventional sources for her statements of "fact": at one point, commenting on the public relations statements made by Peckham's Poultry (where Carmen has spent several years working), she says that

she does not believe the Peckham's PR claim that "[o]nly a happy bird lays eggs," and quotes "[m]y *Enquire Within on Everything* (1789)" as saying "[i]f you want to keep a hen laying all winter... don't let it run with the cock" (GR, 115). Still later in the novel, after beginning to use comparisons with and metaphors relating to the history of the Roman Empire, Hattie explains her use of them: "(Someone's dropped off twelve copies of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* at the Centre. The print is tiny but the contents are absorbing...)" (GR, 172). The irreverence of Hattie's use of material from any text which is available to her is enhanced by the clear implication that the processes of reading and writing are inextricably linked with each other. Her writing is made up of fragments of what she reads, while her reading matter is also shown to influence the manner in which she interprets the "real-life" events she describes.

Another moment in which Hattie explicitly deals with the process of her creation of narrative is related to this. She says that

[a]long with *Decline and Fall*, our unknown benefactor had dumped a cardboard box of paperbacks, all romantic fiction, outside the Centre. They stayed outside all night and no one even stole them, as our occupational therapist, a stern feminist, had hoped they would. It rained hard during the night and the volumes, shoddy enough to begin with, were sodden by the time Alison carried them in. It was difficult to separate the pages and so make any consecutive sense of what was written, and some had simply fallen out, and were mixed up with a collection of the torn-out protective tabs of sanitary towels, for some reason also in the box... [t]he tabs are plastic, and hard to dispose of, I know. You can't burn them and it seems unethical to flush them down the loo. I felt, as I sorted through the pages, matching heroine to hero, title to plot, that I was picking over the debris of the world. But most of us live amongst the debris anyway (GR, 176).

In spite of the disapproval of the "stern feminist" occupational therapist, then, Hattie is eager to read the paperbacks, apparently not concerned by the fact that they are part of that most maligned of contemporary literary genres, "romantic fiction". Whilst

the “stern feminist” -- herself an ironic cliché -- presumably disapproves of the “sexist” content of the paperbacks, they are also seen to have so little value that they are not stolen in spite of spending the whole night outside. The link between Hattie’s creation of narrative and her process of reading the paperbacks: “sort[ing] through the pages, matching heroine to hero, title to plot” is also implied here: a similar process is clearly at work. Her narrative is Hattie’s attempt to sort through her own life, as well as an effort to make sense of “the debris of the world”. This passage also contains feminist statements which are as powerful as they are veiled.³

Firstly, there is the presence of the “collection of torn-out protective tabs of sanitary towels”, signifying the problem of the constitution of female identity for contemporary women. The tabs, which invoke the quintessentially female process of menstruation, are representative of the trappings surrounding the female body, which might in fact be said to constitute that body as such, and thus play a crucial part in the constitution of female identity. The tabs are problematic. Like the experience of being female, even (or perhaps particularly) in a culture which provides such technologically advanced methods of “coping” with -- or masking the facts of -- menstruation, they will not disappear. They are “hard to dispose of” because they can’t be burned, as they’re made of plastic, and “it seems

³ Although I have stated that the description of the “stern feminist” is an ironic one, exposing and making fun of a particular contemporary characterisation of the feminist subject, it might be argued that it is meant as a criticism of a particular brand of feminism. Weldon has certainly never avoided making controversial remarks in this area. One might also argue that this is an example of the less overtly feminist position characteristic of Weldon’s novels of the late 1980s and 1990s, particularly when compared with the novels of the 1970s. Whichever option one chooses, however, my argument regarding the particular feminism of the passage is not affected.

unethical to flush them down the loo". Being female, the passage thus suggests, is at best an unresolved problem, from a bodily point of view. The female body, like the box of romantic novels and the sanitary towel tabs, is not acceptable to western culture. However, this body does not disappear as a result of the ignoring -- or non-signification in language and culture -- of it, and is thus experienced as a problem or in highly ambiguous ways by women.

The second implicitly feminist moment in the passage is the link which is established between the concerns of "romantic fiction" and the process of "picking over the debris of the world". It seems to me that the point here is that the concerns of women, which are mostly either belittled or ignored, just as "romantic fiction" is, are part of the "world", and are thus important and vital ones.⁴ No matter, asserts Hattie, that it is the "debris of the world" that she is talking about, since "most of us live amongst the debris anyway". What is being suggested here is the centrality of the problem of female identity, which is also (a central part of) the issue or problem of sexual difference, "one of the major philosophical issues, if not the issue, of our age" (Irigaray, 1993a, 5).

I have been arguing that Hattie's narrative bears a marked resemblance to the model proposed by Irigaray and Gallop, in which they emphasise the importance of "a new sort of psychoanalytic writing, one in which the analyst's mastery is

⁴ Feminist analyses of the politics of romantic fiction include Cora Kaplan (1986) *Sea Changes: Culture and Feminism* (London, Verso), Jan Cohn (1988) *Romance and the Erotics of Property* (Durham, Duke University Press), Jean Radford (ed) (1986) *The Progress of Romance: the politics of popular fiction* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul) and Janice Radway (1984) *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press).

undercut by the recognition that the analyst too has an unconscious which traverses the analytic scene" (Gallop, 1982, 102). While it should be emphasised that the unconscious is in no way equivalent to the body, I would now like to explore the links between Hattie's body and her narrative more fully. This is because of the ambivalence and contradiction, some of which I detailed above, which appears in Hattie's narrative as soon as she begins to acknowledge -- or to attempt to acknowledge -- the unconscious desires which fuel, direct and even manufacture it. As Gallop argues, "[t]o read for and affirm confusion [and] contradiction is to insist on thinking the body in history. Those confusions mark the sites where thinking is literally knotted to the subject's historical and material place" (1988, 132).

Hattie's narrative is linked with her bodily state from the very beginning of the novel. Simply put, the implication is that she creates written narrative because she cannot experience reality herself. She is the reason for, the engine behind, events in the story of Carmen, Annie and Laura. Thus, for example, while various pivotal events do take place while Hattie is away from Fenedge, there is a growing suspicion -- not least in Hattie's own mind -- that it is only her presence which causes things to happen, "as if the place and the people had simply marked time, waiting for my return, for my ongoing observation of them, before doing anything to alter their lives" (GR, 95). Soon, she is making jokes about this, saying that "before you could say Jack Robinson or 'Thank God Hattie's back in town', events began to erupt, to pile one on top of the other" (GR, 101).

However, *Growing Rich* is also explicitly concerned with the narrative or history of Hattie's body itself. This story is predominantly one of medical history, and indeed, the medical and other "caring" professions figure largely. No sooner has the

novel begun, for example, than Hattie goes to Chicago for an operation intended “to reinstate the flow of blood to my spinal column... and thus return to me the use of my legs” (*GR*, 19). She is very aware of her own status with regard to these operations: she is a suitable body on which to try new techniques, with the result that “[a]ccounts of my condition get written up from time to time in the medical press” (*GR*, 19). Later on in the novel, invited back to the same Chicago hospital for further (free) treatment after the failure of the operation which removes her from Fenedge close to the start of the novel, Hattie implies more childish motives on the part of the surgeons. She says that “[t]hese days they don’t have enough to do... [because] invasive surgery is unpopular” (*GR*, 94), amplifying her earlier comment that “there was something in their tone of voice so like Alison’s as she addressed the watery sky and defied God that I was reluctant to accept their offer” (*GR*, 74).

The cause of Hattie’s paralysis is revealed only close to the end of the novel, after an accident in which a truck reverses into the Otherly Abled Resource Centre’s front window. Hattie tells the reader, “[I] had got out of my wheelchair and run across the room” (*GR*, 198). Dr Grafton’s reaction to this incident – afterwards, Hattie cannot “repeat the action, although of course I tried” (*GR*, 198) – is to deny its possibility. His attitude to Hattie’s body, and part of the story of the origin of her paralysis, is revealed at this point as Hattie explains, “he was convinced that I had earned my disability by having undergone an abortion in my youth” (*GR*, 198). Later, she tells a fuller version of the story: “I was twenty-three when complications following a bodged pregnancy termination required emergency invasive surgery and a wasp bit the knife-wielding hand mid-stroke, and a section of my neural fibre was inadvertently severed” (*GR*, 205). At this point, then, the issue of abortion and the

reactions it provokes is introduced. Rather than appearing as an isolated “feminist issue”, however, it forms a kind of extension of the various ethical debates which Hattie has engaged in during her narrative. These include an explicit, almost obsessive, effort to understand the concept of luck, good or bad. As Hattie explains to the reader after finally telling the story of the origin of her paralysis, “[s]o you understand why I am preoccupied with concepts of ‘lucky’ and ‘unlucky’, and the ethical links which join them” (GR, 205). Also relevant is the novel’s preoccupation with the notion of “health” and various kinds of treatment for diseases and illnesses.⁵ The context of the mentioning of Hattie’s abortion is thus one in which a rigorous process of questioning of the concepts of right and wrong, good and bad, has taken place. Her “answer” to the ethical controversy surrounding abortion in western culture is equivocal, and is contained in two separate moments. One occurs as part of her explanation regarding her “preoccupation with the concepts of ‘lucky’ and ‘unlucky’,” in which she says “[I]ucky to be alive, ‘unlucky’ to be paralysed [after the termination]; ‘deserving it’, as Dr Grafton would say. But deserving what? The luck or the unluck? Forget it” (GR, 205). It is clear that she has thought through – and much of this process, I would argue, takes place during the course of *Growing Rich* – the issue of abortion, together with her own experience of it, and has emerged without a clear-cut and obvious answer. She does not regret having the abortion;

⁵ Apart from Hattie and her experiences with Dr Grafton and the Chicago doctors, there is also the issue of female health in general: Annie’s anorexia, Audrey’s stomach cancer, Carmen’s boil, Mavis’ healing powers and own experience of bodily invasion, Laura’s experiences of childbirth. Both Annie’s father Alan – who is an ambulance worker – and Mr Bliss (in many ways depicted as the opposite of Driver), who cares for animals and humans in purely naturopathic ways, are also tied into *Growing Rich*’s extensive exploration of the concepts of health and illness.

crucially, I think, the reader is never told anything about the context of the original decision to have it. In other words, she never gives an explanation, which might also be seen as an excuse or an attempt to deny guilt, for her action, but merely attempts to understand its consequences for her. This position is hinted at when she first mentions the abortion, and makes a joke regarding, and using, the lexical manner in which reference to abortion is made. Hattie follows the statement that “Dr Grafton was convinced that I had earned my disability by having undergone an abortion in my youth” with the parenthesised joke: “([w]ell, that is to say, the baby underwent it, not me)” (GR, 198). This is a complex moment. Hattie is using the language of anti-abortionists when she refers to her foetus as a “baby”, yet she is simultaneously -- and via this very “imitation” of the “pro-life” position -- challenging Dr Grafton’s assertion that she has “earned” her disability because of her guilt with regard to the foetus’s demise. Beneath the surface of the joke, of course, is a great deal of pain and suffering on Hattie’s part.

Growing Rich links the issue of women’s health with the power to create or to sustain life via the narrative of Hattie’s bodily experiences. As Irigaray notes, “[h]ardly anything, in our present society, enables women to be *female sexed subjects*.... So what is a possible definition of their well-being? They are often slightly unwell? Maybe” (1993b, 101, original emphasis and ellipsis). It is certainly true that the female characters of *Growing Rich* are “often slightly unwell”. It might be important, then, to note the reasons for and explanations offered with regard to Hattie’s recovery of her health at the end of the novel. Just prior to her recovery, Hattie encounters Driver, admits that he makes her “quite breathless with desire” (GR, 216), and has a moment of anguish in which she reduces the origin of

everything in her narrative up to this point to that of simple sexual longing. She says:

I had, through Carmen, cast Driver as Mephistopheles, or Videostopheles, Satan of the new fictional world so many people lived in, or tried to, but only because I fancied him, this swaggering young man in uniform and breeches, and could never have him, never have anyone. I might as well be dead (*GR*, 217).

Hattie's narrative is, at this point, viewed as the product of the fact that she is prevented from living in the world as a "female sexed subject". Now, what Irigaray means by "female sexed subject" and the subjective position to which Hattie accedes and which seems to "cure" her might be argued to be rather different things. Irigaray is speaking about a female subject which is, she says, a subject who is "still the place, the whole of the place where she cannot appropriate herself as such" (1991, 53) or about whom "[t]he best that can be said is that she does *not exist yet*" (1985a, 166, emphasis in original). What Hattie discovers is that "to live in the world was not to be lonely: it was an insult to it to be bored, a privilege to exist at all, even without the use of legs" (*GR*, 237), and it is shortly after this that Dr Grafton's young assistant, trying to adjust what he diagnoses as a slipped disc in Hattie's back, also helps bring back the use of her legs. Hattie is undecided about the reason for her recovery, wondering if

the paralysis was indeed hysterical; [or] perhaps the Chicago neural graft had finally done its work; perhaps some disc in my backbone, which had been causing the trouble, was released: perhaps the benefit from Carmen's assent to her own female nature flowed into me as well... (*GR*, 237).

Hattie's newfound "health" is both the product and the object of ambivalence. It is difficult to argue that she has been able, finally, to "discover for [herself] the characteristics of [her] sexed identity... [so as] to be in good health" (Irigaray, 1993b,

105). She does not know whether her release from paralysis is the result of some change in her mental outlook (away from “hysteria”, and towards some kind of generalised recognition of the value of all life, as her earlier statement seems to suggest), or whether it is the result of medical intervention, or even simple coincidence. She also suggests that it might be “the benefit from Carmen’s assent to her own female nature” which “cures” her, Hattie. It is not clear, at this or any other point in *Growing Rich*, whether this is an ironic statement, or whether it is actually a seriously entertained explanation for the benefit of Hattie’s being able to move around independently and no longer being “otherly abled”. The ambivalent status of Hattie’s “cure” is reinforced in the moment at which she refers to the actual writing of the novel. It was not, as the reader might have spent the novel imagining, written by a woman unable to do much else since she was confined to a wheelchair. Rather, it is the product of the “healthy” Hattie of the novel’s end and is (partly, at least) the solution to her new, practical needs: now that “[my] disability allowance had ceased”, she says “I would have to find a job, or *write a novel*: something” (*GR*, 249, my emphasis). The novel in question is, by implication, *Growing Rich* itself. The novel’s narrative structure is part Hattie’s bodily history, part her telling of the story of Carmen, Annie and Laura. The narrative structure thus performs, as well as comments on and speaks about, the problematic process of the constitution of female identity in a culture where such a (sexed) identity struggles to exist at all.

In order to continue showing how this struggle is explored in *Growing Rich*, Hattie’s initially celebratory, then increasingly ambivalent portrayal of Carmen must be examined. This portrayal might be said to begin with the experiences and influence of Carmen’s mother, Raelene, who begins the novel as part of “a family of

slobs" (GR, 14), a family which is overwhelmingly lazy and seems unable to exist any other way. Raelene is described as a woman who "ate for comfort and suffered from depression: her chin and her neck were as one" (GR, 14). It is Raelene who learns about saturated fats and the importance of diet and exercise when she unwittingly becomes part of Driver (or the Devil's) run of good luck for Carmen, and who thus proceeds to transform not just her own body but also those of her husband and son. Raelene also embodies the woman who cannot be relied upon to be truthful about the identity of her children's father(s). Carmen, for example, widely believed to have been "switched at birth" (GR, 14), is herself unwilling to believe that Andy is her father. When Raelene tells her misbehaving daughter that she is "the Devil's own daughter" (GR, 15), Carmen replies that this means that Raelene "must have had it off with the Devil" (GR, 15), at which point Raelene, horrified, drops the bottle she is holding. It later appears that Carmen and Raelene are correct and that Carmen is indeed the Devil's child, or at least the child of someone other than Raelene's husband. At this later point, Carmen realises that "Raelene had no idea at all who her [Carmen's] father was; she'd been conceived in an alley at the back of a pub somewhere, by-product of fun with a stranger" (GR, 200).

Raelene's experience of her sexuality is thus that of the woman whose body is opaque to her and which seems to act independently of her will on occasion. Her mind seems largely separate – in her own conception of herself – from her body. She is very much the woman described by Emily Martin in *The Woman in the Body* (1987): someone whose central image of her identity is contained in the idea that "[y]our self is separate from your body" (86). Raelene's experiences make it clear that this internalisation of the Cartesian mind/body split is both alienating and

debilitating for female subjects, who are thus rendered unable to make sense of their wayward and “difficult” bodies.

Irigaray takes up this point in an essay entitled “Women-Mothers, the Silent Substratum of the Social Order”, in which she states that

[w]omen do not in fact suffer much from delusions. If they could, it would protect them. They suffer in their bodies. An absolutely immense bodily suffering... which finds expression in depressive collapses. But that is not even the blaze of madness (1991, 48).

The body thus becomes the site of confusion, and of suffering as a result of this confusion. While Raelene’s suffering is depicted as important to her, and to Carmen, it is substantially less clear than the physical sufferings of Annie and her mother Mavis, or Laura and her mother Audrey (although, even in these cases, there is no “blaze of madness” as Irigaray puts it, but rather various “depressive collapses” which might seem less dramatic or as lacking in obvious importance).⁶ The problem for all of these characters is one of non-symbolization, of being unable to express the relation between the female body and female identity in its entirety. Crucially, the bodily confusion from which these female characters suffer should not be viewed as a result of the “immutable characteristics of women’s ‘nature’, but [is] an effect of women’s position relative to the symbolic order as its ‘residue’ or its ‘waste’” (Whitford, 1991b, 79).

A related result of this, according to Irigaray, is the dearth of useful models of positive relationships between women, which in turn results in widespread

⁶ Although Weldon’s constant references to these “depressive collapses” of all kinds show her acute awareness of the importance of paying attention to -- and thus perhaps trying to alleviate -- these apparently weak, irrelevant or unimpressive female (bodily) experiences.

dissension and hostility between them. Critics of Weldon's work have commented on her own frequently negative portrayals of the relationships between women. Even in novels written during the 1970s, a decade in which western women made important political advances, Weldon "places considerable emphasis on antagonisms and rivalries between women" (Palmer, 1989, 151). The radical feminist notion of sisterhood also comes under fire in Weldon's novels, in which, according to Lorna Sage, "she refuses to see women as experts in continuity and communion" (1992, 154). While the slight tone of disapproval which is often contained in these comments is one which I would prefer to avoid, it is nevertheless reasonable to assert that women's relationships with each other are far from simple in Weldon's novels. However, while ambivalences in this area certainly exist in *Growing Rich*, this novel is also something of an exception in that its central protagonists are frequently extremely loyal to one another, and none more so than Carmen.

While Carmen is arguably loyal to her female friends, however, the view which these friends, the other female characters of *Growing Rich*, and the narrator have of her is much less simple. Laura, for example, first decides that Carmen's continued virginity must indicate that "perhaps Carmen had some kind of sexual hang-up" (GR, 97), then eventually implies that Carmen is simply lying about her virginity: "[i]f you believe that, you'll believe anything. I prefer to believe [Driver]'s her ghostly lover: they had it off under an ash tree in the moonlight" (GR, 120). After a long period of constant body changes on Carmen's part, Laura remarks to Hattie that it is "extraordinary... how different Carmen [can] look and still remain the same person -- an actress's facility, of course" (GR, 145). The suggestion that

Carmen is not always telling the truth, that she is an “actress” who makes herself appear different in order to further her own ends, is also reinforced by Hattie herself, both indirectly, as it is done here, and also in a more direct manner. Addressing the reader on Carmen’s story, Hattie says that it is difficult to be sure of “[w]hether or not Carmen’s tale was true, whether or not the night spent with Sir Bernard was as chaste as she said – and what we were hearing was just another example of Carmen’s capacity for blocking out her own sexuality; in other words, downright lies – ...” (*GR*, 227).⁷ Carmen is viewed with increasing caution and ambivalence by all the other female characters, in spite of her close relationships with some of them. They are all willing to believe that she is lying, dissembling, or perhaps psychologically damaged in some way, before they are prepared to accept that she is fighting a genuine battle for her own – and partly, for their – happiness.

The very first time that Carmen’s body alters as part of Driver’s attempts to acquire her soul – and her body, to be given to Bernard Bellamy – her loyalty to Annie and Laura is what frustrates Driver’s plans for her.⁸ Told that she “can have a freebie – just to show you what I mean” (*GR*, 45), Carmen – with Annie and Laura – watches in surprise and growing horror as her body begins to become beautiful while they sit in Fenedge unemployment exchange. From the three of them being

⁷ Hattie has already emphasised the story as having “passed through her imagination and mine, [so] the account of it may not much resemble any actual event” (*GR*, 225). It can thus not be argued that this later disparagement of Carmen’s story is simply another instance of the manner in which she continually calls the truth status of her own – and all – narrative into question.

⁸ In spite of the power of this initial loyalty, Carmen finally defeats Driver only via her marriage, and loyalty, to Bernard Bellamy. I will be discussing the impact of this apparent change of allegiance, or capitulation to control by the masculine, below.

pressed together on narrow metal chairs, forming “a kind of untidy wodge of unhealthy pale young female flesh topped by clouds of hair” (*GR*, 46), Carmen becomes the one who stands out. She says that “I reckon I’ve gone from an A cup to a C... my waist’s got small, so my hips poke out in a ridiculous way. And I swear my legs are longer, or somehow my skirt has got shorter” (*GR*, 46). Even her feet and fingers become longer, narrower and more elegant. More than simple outward, physical characteristics, however, is the “fine-boned tranquillity about her face,” and the fact that, when she frowns, “even the frown was delicate, and the skin on her brow smooth and perfect: that same facial expression which yesterday would have meant Carmen was in a sulk now made her seem charming, and in need of help” (*GR*, 47). Laura suspects that they are experiencing “a group hallucination,” while Annie tells Carmen that she reminds her “of the Incredible Hulk... [h]is clothes were always splitting as his true nature appeared” (*GR*, 47). It rapidly becomes clear that Carmen’s “true nature” is not appearing, since she does not accept the employment exchange’s job offer (which is made on the basis of her new appearance) of a place at Bellamy Airspace as a trainee stewardess. The narrator comments that “[t]he improvement in her looks had not softened her nature” (*GR*, 48). However, the notion of “true nature” is also problematised here, since Carmen is affected by the transformation in her appearance. Although she refuses the job offer, rudely saying that she doesn’t “want to be a flying waitress,” she does not make a second rude joke a moment later, because “the new configuration of her lips – perfectly moulded: a natural smooth line of clear rose around a cupid’s bow of pink – somehow prevented her from saying words too upfront for comfort” (*GR*, 48). The influence of her (new) physical appearance over her inner self is thus acknowledged, but is

simultaneously denied complete control. Carmen's loyalty to Annie and Laura enables her to decide that "if I'm going to be a waitress I'd rather do it at Bellamy House Hotel with my friends" (*GR*, 48), at which point her body returns, abruptly, to its original and unremarkable size and shape.

Carmen does finally decide to work at Bellamy Airspace: she answers an advertisement for a receptionist, telephoning for an interview from close to Hattie Upton's post at the window of the Disabled Centre. Hattie says that

I will swear that when she went in [to the telephone booth] she was pretty enough in her swarthy way, but slightly dumpy, and when she came out she was beautiful, leggy and bosomy, but repeatedly kicking her feet against the wall as if in a temper (*GR*, 72).

Thus begins a period of "good luck" for Carmen, her friends, and Fenedge itself.

The fortunes of the whole town, and everyone in it, become linked with the state of Carmen's body for the rest of the novel. Carmen soon becomes aware of the cause of her almost constant bodily alterations, and resists Driver's attempts to get her to marry, or at least to have sex with, Bernard Bellamy. After being informed of her being "given a little on account... [i]tem, beauty in the eye of the beholder" (*GR*, 82), Carmen simply tells Driver that she does not want beauty of any kind. It is important to note how Carmen's physical appearance remains at odds with her sense of herself as independent and powerful. Far from finding the transformation to beauty empowering, she finds it irritating, uncomfortable and disconcerting. Driver becomes very angry, and insists that Carmen should accept the gift of beauty since "[b]eauty is all the power that women ever have" (*GR*, 84), but Carmen, thinking of Mrs Baker, her high school teacher, does not agree and changes the subject, since

"he was sparking and smoking a bit, like his own engine, overheated" (*GR*, 84).⁹ At this point, then, Carmen refuses to cooperate with Driver, and the fortunes of Laura, Annie and the town as a whole change decisively for the worse. So too does Carmen's fortune: she spends the next few years living in a squat and working at Peckham's Poultry.

Driver also offers Carmen various other rich, attractive and powerful suitors, among them a prince, a diplomat, and a film star, all of which she refuses. It is only when Driver's "bad luck" begins to affect Annie and Laura on a much more directly physical and emotional level that Carmen begins seriously to contemplate capitulating to his demands. Laura, giving birth to her fourth child, Hannah, "had such a hard time in labour that the baby had been born, apparently, with a dislocated hip" (*GR*, 183), and her husband Woodie starts behaving more and more like her father Kim. She tells Carmen that it is "a bit much to have both father and husband entranced by someone as simple, easy, hopeless, blonde and good-natured as [her neighbour] Angela" (*GR*, 183). Annie, on the other hand, quarrels with her fiancé, Tim, and his family in New Zealand. She returns to Fenedge with a severe case of anorexia, and eventually has to be hospitalised.

It is when Carmen discovers that Annie might well die that she finally "give[s] in" to Driver's demands and decides that she will "sleep with Sir Bernard. Anything" (*GR*, 206). From being a source of strength, her loyalty to her friends has become a

⁹ While Carmen and Fenedge's fortunes are reflected in the alterations in her size, shape and "aesthetic qualities", Driver and his machine – the car and its engine – are closely identified throughout the novel. The phallic imagery of the car as extension of Driver's body adds to the reader's perception of both his physical and spiritual power, and his status as exemplary representative of male power in the text.

handicap, to both them and herself. However, on the night she is finally to be deflowered by Sir Bernard, they decide to get married before having sex with each other, and Driver is thus tricked, since Carmen has evaded the terms of her contract with him. This leads to her -- and Sir Bernard's -- eventual defeat of Driver.

Driver's apparent victory is thus linked to Carmen's attempts to protect and remain loyal to her friends, while his eventual defeat is related to Carmen's acceptance of an elderly capitalist (and destroyer of the natural environment) as a husband, not just as her first sexual partner. Hattie comments,

[w]hether or not Carmen's tale was true, whether or not the night spent with Sir Bernard was as chaste as she said -- and what we were hearing was just another example of Carmen's capacity for blocking out her own sexuality; in other words, downright lies -- the fates seemed to take *her compliance with male authority, her willingness to submit to Sir Bernard, as good enough for them*, and Annie ate, and was restored (GR, 227-8, my emphasis).

Is what is being suggested by *Growing Rich* that it is "compliance with male authority" which is needed by ambitious and intelligent young women? Is the acceptance of a fairly benign type of masculine authority (Sir Bernard, or "Bernie" [GR, 248], as Carmen is soon calling him) the only way to escape a positively malevolent masculine force (personified in this text by Driver/the Devil)? Both of these suggestions are credible, I think: it is probably possible to argue that Weldon has produced a kind of old wives' tale or fairy story for the 1990s in *Growing Rich*, and intends Carmen's fate to be seen as a kind of contemporary feminist allegory.¹⁰

¹⁰ On the other hand, one might perhaps argue that Carmen's story can be interpreted as a reply to some recent feminist literary theorists, particularly those who uncritically accept the authority of male theories and critical models. It is, for example, a kind of rejection of Gallop's argument that since "Lacan is impolite enough, ungentlemanly enough, immoderate enough to flaunt the phallic disproportion" he should be studied and listened to; and the accompanying corollary that a theorist who "appears as woman's ally... [with] his faith in the harmonious

However, it is important to avoid purely prescriptivist criticisms of the ending of *Growing Rich*, such as those that might brand the text “anti-feminist” or some kind of “failure” in terms of what are -- or should be -- the “aims” of the feminist writer. As I have shown in previous chapters, the moments of confusion and ambivalence in Weldon’s writing, while often initially difficult to come to terms with, are examples of the way a text, as Shoshana Felman argues, “exceeds both the control and the deliberate intention of the writer’s consciousness,” but which “can be amplified, made patent, by the desire -- and by the rhetorical interposition -- of a woman reader” (1993, 6). It is also tempting to argue that the dilemma which Weldon has created for herself by setting up an implacable and attractive male force in Driver, and a powerful female one in Carmen, is expressed via her apparent inability to herself find a satisfactory solution. For example, Carmen capitulates, then reneges on the subsequent agreement with Driver, at least four times in the novel. I would assert that this results at least in part from being unable to find -- in feminist terms -- a way to resolve the opposition between them and thus end the novel with some kind of resolution of the problem it exposes.

I would like, therefore, to return to the question of Carmen’s experience of her constantly altering body. By closely examining particular passages in which this is discussed, both by Carmen’s “voice” in the text, and by Hattie Upton, the importance of this central device to the workings of *Growing Rich* will be made clearer.

relation between the sexes” (1982, 18-19) should not. Gallop asks, “[o]f what use is that faith when it wants nothing more than to cover over the disharmony from which feminism arises and which it would change” (1982, 18-19), while *Growing Rich* seems to suggest that sometimes, the “covering over of disharmony” is the only possible solution.

Carmen's distress at the state of constant flux in which her body exists begins in her late teens, when it first begins to alter so rapidly. She "thought she might one day have to have cosmetic surgery to get the size of her breasts reduced.... Her figure seemed to be variable, as that of other girls was not" (GR, 79). At this point, she even goes to see Dr Grafton because the shape of her nipples, in particular, changes daily, and she is worried that she might have skin cancer. Carmen's bodily worries are at this point an exaggerated but still recognisable form of the "ordinary" anxiety of the female teenager about her body and its development. However, they also soon become the basis for a new distrust of the world: the fact that "[h]er breasts felt heavier by the moment" leads immediately to Carmen's feeling that she "could never trust anyone again" (GR, 81). Here, Carmen's experience of continual bodily change leads to a new relationship between herself and the outside world. Aware of the incomprehension (at best) which her experiences, told to anyone else, will elicit, Carmen becomes wary of the world and of most of its inhabitants.¹¹

As an adult, later on in the novel, Carmen is still an outsider, the "bad girl" (GR, 217) of Fenedge, but she has grown more accustomed to the continual changes in, particularly, the size and shape of her breasts. *Growing Rich* is filled with remarks about them: the morning after having dinner with Driver, she is relieved to discover that "her bosom, thank heaven, had shrunk a couple of cup sizes" (GR, 127). On another occasion, she describes them as having "a pronounced curve upwards from the ribcage to the nipple; they were immodest" (GR, 225). Carmen

¹¹ In spite of "having gone from a D cup to a B overnight," for example, Carmen notes early on that "[h]er parents had stopped noticing. Anyone can get used to anything" (GR, 81).

does not like them at all. As Driver says, however, it doesn't really have much to do with her since, "those are my breasts, not yours" (*GR*, 225). The fact that Carmen's body is not physically her own is repeatedly and brutally conveyed by moments such as this, in which Carmen is forced to acknowledge that her body exists only for others -- either Driver or the gaze of another man, such as Bernard Bellamy or Ronnie Cartwright -- and is scarcely her own at all. Although she enjoys, in particular, her "long slim" arms and legs (*GR*, 127, 212), and likes some of her facial characteristics, Carmen often remarks that a particular bodily configuration is "too robust for her taste, but tolerable" (*GR*, 185) or tells Driver that he is "so old-fashioned" when he gives her an "hourglass" (*GR*, 121) figure. At best, Carmen simply becomes resigned to her constant changes, looking at her reflection and saying "Yes, I'm a redhead," since "she could see she was. She'd started the morning mouse" (*GR*, 208). Commenting on her old, safety-pinned underwear, she asserts that she "was not so much sluttish in her choice of undergarments as taking precautions against unexpected shape change" (*GR*, 224).

Carmen is thus able to make judgements about the man she is to have sex with and marry by noting what her body does in preparation for seeing him. As already noted, Driver's taste in bodies is "old-fashioned"; he prefers large breasts, a tiny waist, and curvy hips. Sir Bernard Bellamy's appears to be as follows:

a person, a female, settled down into a Madonna body, only with a stupid, pretty face -- wide-set eyes, high forehead and bruised mouth, and a Michael Jackson look about the eyebrow, and a Dallas hairstyle, and nails which even as she looked were turning from crimson-painted to palest pink (*GR*, 213).

Thus Carmen dispassionately describes herself as she prepares for her crucial final

date with him.¹² She knows that her body is altering itself to be what Sir Bernard would most like and desire, and by this time, experiences the change as if she is a spectator or third person witness to the alteration, not as if she is implicated or affected by the change at all. She goes on to say that she "did not think she could respect or admire a man who could only love a girl like her, but that was not the point" (GR, 213-4). For Carmen, then, Martin's assertion that women experience themselves as separate from their bodies becomes her only possibility for survival.¹³ Irigaray's argument that it is impossible to exist as a female sexed subject -- a female subject *with a body* -- is also illustrated by Carmen's experience of her body.¹⁴ Raelene's statement, culled from the pages of *The Independent*, that heads this chapter therefore stands as a grim reminder that control over the alterations of Carmen's body does not in any way belong to her, but is in the hands of an outside force of some kind. While Marks and Spencer and *The Independent* presumably see female body changes as the product of fairly benign "social forces", *Growing Rich* suggests, via both Driver and Sir Bernard, that these forces might not be particularly benign towards the women they affect.

When Carmen speaks of not being able to love and respect a man who can

¹² This description of Carmen's "Sir Bellamy" body, with pieces of identity "taken" from contemporary icons of popular culture, also suggests both that Sir Bernard's class origins are "low", in spite of his fame and fortune, and indicates the manner in which identity changes might be said to be linked with social reality. It is also important to note the icons chosen: both Madonna and Jackson are themselves famous for constant changes of identity, both physical and otherwise.

¹³ See Martin (1987), whose insights I have already used in this chapter as a way of explaining the relationship which exists between Carmen's mother Raelene's self and her body.

¹⁴ See Irigaray's essay "How to Conceive (of) a Girl" in *Speculum of the other woman* (1985a).

in his turn "only love a girl like her" (GR, 214), who is she intending to indicate by the pronoun "her"? It is clear that she is speaking about the "her" in the mirror. But as I have shown, Carmen does not recognise this "her" as herself: rather, the use of the third person here would indicate that Carmen is describing someone else (an other "girl"), someone who is Driver's creation and Sir Bernard's desire. And yet, grammatically, it is not clear whom Carmen means to indicate, since she could be speaking about herself in an ironic or colloquial manner, which would explain the use of the third person equally well. At this late stage in the novel, after which Carmen's view of her own body and identity is less and less present in the text, this identity is seen to rest on a pronoun whose referent cannot be ascertained with certainty. In other words, Carmen's bodily identity is not her own creation (much less something of which she is proud), but it is also not necessarily *not* her identity. She seems to view herself as both "I" and "she", and not to know where the former begins and the latter ends, or vice versa.¹⁵

In the aftermath and context of this moment of confusion of identity on Carmen's part, her acceptance of Sir Bernard might be seen to be less of a capitulation -- particularly in feminist terms -- and more of an awareness that there is no other path open to her. Carmen's predicament is the exaggerated one of the fairytale or allegory, as I have already indicated. However, the manner in which her body is used by Driver for his own ends (in spite of his eventual "defeat", which is

¹⁵ *Growing Rich* ends with *Annie's* recovery and wedding to Tim in New Zealand; it is her "happily ever after" (her final acceptance of an identity as wife) with which the reader is presented, rather than Carmen's. This again emphasises my point regarding the difficulty with which resolution, in the form of narrative closure, is imposed on the novel.

equivocal anyway)¹⁶ and experienced more and more as a site of confusion and ambivalence also reflects the experience of many other female subjects. With bodies constituted as female in particular ways, in accordance with the desires and political needs of the powerful and (almost invariably) masculine subject, these bodies are both women's own, and in many ways not their own. Fighting this predicament usually leads to the necessity for some kind of accommodation to it, and in *Growing Rich*, Carmen's final decision can thus be seen as an "assent to her own female nature" (GR, 237).

This chapter has tried to show how some of the female bodies -- and the women whose bodies they are -- in *Growing Rich* are affected by "the matrices of power at all levels" (Jacobus et al, 1990, 2). The novel ends, from a particular kind of feminist perspective, in a defeat, since the central and rebellious female character capitulates by marrying an elderly, capitalist patriarch. Furthermore, the narrator of the novel -- released from her wheelchair at the time of this capitulation, just as Carmen herself is released from a life in Fenedge -- describes this, in essentialist terms, as an "assent to her own female nature" (GR, 237). Hattie follows this statement with the knowing comment, "though what feminist would want to hear that" (GR, 237), and the implication is that no feminist would like to hear it. However, this ending, this "capitulation", can be read in a different manner, via Shoshana Felman's notion of making the excess of the text "patent, by the desire -- and by the rhetorical interposition -- of a woman reader" (1993, 6). My desire as a woman reader was, initially, for a novel which ended differently. I responded, therefore, to

¹⁶ See the description of this "defeat" in *Growing Rich*, pp 246-8.

Hattie's call to "feminists". However, a different feminist response has been outlined above. It is a response which uses the excess of both the novel's ending, and the language used in its descriptions of Carmen's bodily experiences, as an example of the difficulties which emerge for the feminist writer/reader when one is writing about women's bodies, who controls and "owns" those bodies, and how this affects female identity. This Weldon text once again points to Irigaray's "desire... for... a [female] genealogy" (Grosz, 1989, 123-4) and her (impossible? paradoxical?) insistence that women need

an autonomously conceived female sexuality, corporeality and morphology [which] requires more than a reorganisation and equalisation of socialisation and child-rearing practices... [and implies the need for] a profound and difficult reorganisation of the forms and means of representation -- a reorganisation of language itself (Grosz, 1989, 109).

As this chapter has shown, it is the very concrete current difficulty, or even impossibility, of creating such new visions of female sexuality and genealogy which is dramatically conveyed by *Growing Rich*. Via the presence of increasing distrust and tension between the female characters, the novel also explores the effects of a cultural lack of useful models for relationships between women (which is, in turn, the result of the lack of a female genealogy). Finally, this "lack of an autonomously conceived female sexuality" is, in *Growing Rich*, shown to impact in various (and frequently negative) ways on the bodies of women.

The President's Child: body, child, control

"What determines and who speaks for the mother? What is her function? Is there a truth of parenthood or only a clash of interested parties? To these questions there are no simple answers, only more questions" (McDonald, 1991, 44).

"Men on the whole don't change. Women change because they have children" (Weldon, 1985a, 314).

The origin of *The President's Child*, published in 1982, reportedly lies within the narrative -- also related in the novel itself -- of Philippine (ex-)President Sukarno's mistress and their son (see Palmer, 1989, 74). Isabel, heroine of *The President's Child*, relates the story to Maia, the novel's narrator, as follows:

Maia... Something comes to mind. The fate of President Sukarno's mistress. Some said she was a piano teacher, others a nightclub performer. Enough that she had the president's child; she lived in Manila. But when the boy was six she started asking for money; recognition for both of them. Mother and child were promptly killed in a car crash. And that would have been that, except questions were asked about the accident, and the President's men tried to frame her brother, who always knew more than he should anyway. But the frame didn't stick, the Press got to know, and the brother was saved. The President, incidentally, was assassinated; but that of course didn't help mother and child. They were dead. What lesson do we learn from that, Maia? (*The President's Child*, hereafter *PC*, 160)

Maia replies that the story might imply that it is safer to live in "the West" than "the East", but Isabel, who is telling the story as a hint about what is happening to her and her own child, Jason, interprets her tale herself. She says that "[i]t might be... that when male power and privilege are at stake the lives and happiness of women and children are immaterial" (*PC*, 160). The novel proves that Isabel's assertion here is indeed a valid one, and from one perspective, then, *The President's Child* is a kind of "satire of the political thriller" (Salzmann-Brunner, 1988, 221), told from the point of view of those usually marginalized by such narratives. But this "satirical"

alteration in perspective is only one aspect of this novel's workings. Agreeing with Fay Weldon herself, who asserts that "there [are] three separate skeins going through it: one [is] a domestic novel, the other [is] a literary novel, and the third [is] a kind of thriller in the middle of it" (1985a, 306), I will in this chapter explore not so much the explicit political commentary of the latter as the complexities of the first two -- the "domestic" and "literary" novels contained within *The President's Child*. The "domestic" thread is comprised of the story of the relationship between Isabel and Dandy, as well as the stories of those who live in the exemplary domestic sphere of Wincaster Row. The "literary" skein of the novel consists primarily of Maia's narrative, with its self-conscious ruminations on both the process of story-telling and the meanings which might be attached to events in the story she tells.

Particularly important to this exploration will be the ways in which the status and position of the mother, and the late-twentieth century concept of "parenting", are expressed in this novel. Paulina Palmer, for example, sees the novel as showing that "Weldon interprets the dialectic of sex as hinging on the struggle between the sexes to gain control of woman's reproductive capacities and the sons she bears" (1989, 74). This issue initially and obviously emerges as part of the "thriller" and "domestic" threads of the novel, but is also, I think, part of what Weldon refers to as the "literary" novel. Isabel's story is one in which she falls in love with and -- without his knowledge -- bears the child of a man who subsequently becomes a very popular, possibly successful Presidential candidate in the USA. Dandy (full name Dandridge) Ivel is protected by "Joe (Hot Potato) Murphy and Pete (Kitten) Sikorski... kingmakers" (PC, 41), both of whom used to work for the CIA. It is these two, rather than Dandy himself, who regard Isabel as "the Australian bitch... [a]

feminist and a radical" (*PC*, 42), and they who, in their role as promoters of Dandy's candidacy, eventually decide that she should be "liquidated, wiped out, taken out, obliterated, dealt with, with extreme prejudice" (*PC*, 66). After two murder attempts, one of which happens as she is crossing a busy street with Jason, and one of which occurs when she is pushed towards an oncoming commuter train, Isabel agrees to be killed so that Jason can live, but Dandy himself dies moments before she is to be "executed", and she is thus saved.

Apart from Isabel's suspect, communist father who "lives in Saigon" (*PC*, 98), Joe and Pete disparage her via the rhetoric of misogyny ("[y]ou can never trust a whore... [a]nd one who gives out for nothing is the worst kind of all" [*PC*, 119]) – and by attacking her as a mother. "I don't like to see her making a sissy out of him," (*PC*, 125) says Pete, commenting on Jason's haircut. When Homer, Isabel's initially perfect husband, also turns out to be part of the "conspiracy against Isabel" (Dowling, 1995, 116), she realises that "Homer worshipped Jason as Dandy's son, not his own. His concern for her, Isabel, had always been as Jason's mother" (*PC*, 199). The idea that Jason could be eliminated from the scene is never seriously entertained by those controlling the IFPC (Ivel For President Campaign), but in spite of Joe's assertion to Elphick that "[w]e don't wage war on women" (*PC*, 190), the reader knows that both Joe and Pete *will* kill women to eliminate threats to Dandy Ivel's campaign, having already read of their murder of Vera, the "[w]andering girl without wedding rings or property" (*PC*, 124). By the end of the novel, the only way to eliminate the threat posed by Isabel to Dandy's campaign is to kill her. Her importance is only that of the mother of the future President's son: her life has no value in and of itself for the male world of power against which she tries to fight. It is

thus made clear that there is no room for compromise positions: either Dandy dies, or she does. In the novel's terms, therefore, the conflict between men and women, even in the western world of the late twentieth century, is a struggle which ends in either death or victory.

As a result of what might appear as the exaggerations and sheer unlikeliness of the world of the thriller skein of *The President's Child*, this aspect of the narrative might be described as allegory, or as a "delectable satire on male formula fiction and its fantasies" (Dowling, 1995, 117). The political narrative and the domestic and literary strands of the novel are, however, more closely related than might at first appear. This relation is created via the rhetoric of motherhood, an examination of which leads in turn to an awareness of the manner in which the divide between the realms of the public and the private is completely destroyed by this novel. In order to explore how this occurs, the question asked in the first epigraph to this chapter, "what determines and who speaks for the mother?", becomes central.

Almost every character in *The President's Child* has a particular and individual view on parenting, and what the correct way to bring up children might be. Behind these ideas are, of course, notions of what fathers and mothers do or should do for their children, and these in turn contain particular ideas about gender identities and what it means to be male or female. Pete and Joe, unsurprisingly, have the most conservative views on the subject: they disapprove of Isabel's career as a television journalist, and themselves have wives who are models of feminine subservience. Pete's wife (who is never given a name in the text), for example, is "a tall, pretty blonde who sprayed herself all over with deodorants four times a day, so as not to cause offence" (PC, 42). Joe expresses the conservative view of the

correct identity for “woman”, “wife” and “mother” when he talks about Isabel:

[i]t is an insult to the sweet name of womanhood... to call her a woman at all. A feminist and a radical! A wife, you say! Is a woman who would make her husband wash the dishes worthy of the name of wife? What sort of mother is it who makes her man change the baby's nappy? We have some problem with definitions here! (PC, 43)

The extreme conservatism of this position is initially the opposite of the opinions held by Isabel's husband, Homer. Their union is described at the start of the novel as “[t]he perfect companionate marriage. The true, the new, the sharing!” (PC, 7). In it, “their lives, their income and the household chores” (PC, 9), are all shared equally between them. The narrator even describes the precise workings of the routine in which the task of taking Jason to school, and fetching him again, is shared (PC, 28). Isabel ascribes the order in her life to Homer's character. His body is “as neat and orderly as his mind” (PC, 25). It is he who notices that Jason is showing an excess of aggression, that he is biting people (this is later revealed to be a lie), and he who disapproves of Jason being given guns for his birthday, or of Isabel's hitting of her son when he disobeys her. Homer is, in his initial and apparent perfection, when contrasted with his actual role in Isabel's life (he was “sent in by Joe and Pete on a watching brief” [PC, 199]), a kind of warning to those who believe that change in the structures of gender relations is easy (or even possible!). In an interview given soon after the publication of *The President's Child*, Weldon says that Homer is the product of her opinion that “you can never trust men..., nice men are only pretending... I'd rather have a nasty man than a nice man any day” (1985a, 307).

Although he seems at first to be the perfect husband, the reader, with Isabel, might begin to doubt Homer's sincerity about equal parenting from the moment close

to the start of the novel when he first tries to persuade Isabel that Jason needs to see a child psychologist. He tells her that

[i]t does seem to me that Jason isn't all that happy. We might be doing something wrong, between us.... Perhaps it's seeing you on the television screen when you ought to be here in the house (*PC*, 36).

The slippage between "we might be doing something wrong" and his implied criticism that "as a mother, you should devote your attention exclusively to your child" is almost too easy. In spite of Isabel's initial reaction, which is to inform her husband that "I get the feeling you resent my job" (*PC*, 37), she is also influenced by what Rosalind Coward describes as the contemporary ideal of the good mother: the notion that "[t]ruly good mothering still evokes ideas of total altruism" (1992, 81).

The result is that Jason is taken to Dr Gregory. Homer's real views on motherhood become clear in Dr Gregory's office during the novel's dénouement, when he informs Isabel: "[I] didn't like your ideas. I didn't like the way you were bringing up Jason. Jason! What a name" (*PC*, 207). He adds, describing Jason's government-funded school: "[y]ou were happy enough for Jason to be brought up in the gutter. That I found hard to forgive" (*PC*, 207). As an attempt at consolation, he then tells Isabel that he believes she is really a good woman "somewhere, beneath your sloppy liberalism, your hysteria, and your female irrationality" (*PC*, 206).¹

The link between the meanings given to the concept of mothering and general views on the feminine is made explicit here. But Homer is not the only one who thinks this way. Dr Gregory, the psychotherapist to whom Isabel first begins to

¹ The darkly ironic humour created via this presentation of Homer's remarks is typical of this novel, and similar to that found in the rest of Weldon's writing, as was shown in the previous chapter of this thesis.

unburden herself of the story of her life and of her relationship with Dandy Ivel, holds similar views, albeit with more impressive theoretical backing.² Like Homer, he presumes to speak on behalf of Jason. Both argue via the notion that what should be done is what they think is right, since they “have the child’s best interests at heart” (*PC*, 209). The power which is derived from this statement, made so frequently in contemporary debates on divorce, child abuse and other “family” issues, is made explicit in *The President’s Child*. The novel juxtaposes the extreme conservatism of the men who range themselves against Isabel because of her son’s parentage with this commonplace (and “commonsense”) statement. It thus shows that to claim to speak on behalf of a child, and to decide what is in his or her “best interests”, is always to take on a position of power.

Another character who has firm and outspoken views on childrearing and the roles of parents is the headmistress of Jason’s school, Mrs Pelotti. Mrs Pelotti’s extensive experience has given her “a low opinion of parents, who seemed to her... to have their children’s worst interests at heart” (*PC*, 53). She berates Isabel for taking Jason to Dr Gregory, insisting that there is nothing wrong with Jason except his parents: she tells Isabel that her son bites because

[y]ou talk to him too much. You ask his advice. You forget he’s too young to give it. You treat him as if he were a grown-up. He’s only six. Of course he bites. He could never talk his way around you lot. What else is he to do? (*PC*, 54-5)

² “‘Homer,’ observed Dr Gregory, ‘there we have the root of the trouble. She will never come to terms with her anger with her father. She misplaces it into aggression against the world and the whole male sex’” (*PC*, 205). This assertion, made ironically sinister by the use of the companionable pronoun “we”, has important resonances with the portrayal of psychoanalysis in the novel. I will be discussing this in detail later in this chapter.

Mrs Pelotti's is, of course, another kind of "commonsense" view of childhood, and she certainly does not hesitate to speak on Jason's behalf. The narrator affords her a large amount of credibility, however, treating Mrs Pelotti's efforts sympathetically throughout the novel. Her success with the children she teaches gives her opinion weight in terms of what actions genuinely might be viewed as "in Jason's best interests". But her view of Isabel and Homer's child-rearing practices also implies her perception of the manner in which Jason is used by his parents as an object through which they validate themselves. Beneath their genuine concern for their son, there is also an element of self-aggrandisement in their relations with him, as there is with all the other parents in the novel. The children become extensions of their parents' beliefs, and sometimes seem to exist primarily as signs of the validity and usefulness of such beliefs. Hence, Isabel's and the apparently "enlightened" Homer's approach to Jason, wherein extensive talking, explaining and reasoning takes place. As Mrs Pelotti points out, this approach does more to validate their own beliefs about childrearing than it empowers Jason, who cannot possibly "talk his way around you lot", and is thus "compelled" to resort to biting.³

Mrs Pelotti is also one of the first people in the novel to notice Jason's increasing likeness to Dandy Ivel (*PC*, 72-3). She gives (conservative) advice on

³ Isabel's friend Doreen and her husband Ian, both of whom have given up their lives in middle-class London for "sheep-farming up a distant Welsh hillside... [driving] a battered Land Rover stuck with anti-nuclear stickers" (*PC*, 51) are also (highly ironically presented) examples of this. Their children are described as "dressed in stiff woolen garments, hand spun, natural dyed, and knitted on very thick needles; their tiny limbs, thus encased, and macrobiotically lean, found movement difficult. They sat on the splintery wooden floor of their homestead and wailed" (*PC*, 51). Another hilarious example of this is the exchange between "Jason's mother" and "Bobby's mother" which takes place after Isabel has struck Jason during his sixth birthday party (*PC*, 33-4).

Jason's haircut (*PC*, 127-8), and tells an increasingly harried Isabel, later in the novel, that even if she entered Isabel into Jason's record as "a neurotic mother" she would only be doing so "for Jason's sake, and not as a rebuke to you" (*PC*, 171). Her perception that parents view all actions with regard to their children as really directed at themselves is further emphasised here. But she is sympathetic to them too: she tells Isabel that she feels "quite sorry for mothers these days. They have lost their children to the nation's education system" (*PC*, 171). Here, the notion of state interference in children's lives -- albeit supposedly positive interference, rather than the arguably highly negative interference by (American) state power in Jason's life -- is introduced in the context of education.⁴ The portrayal of the manner in which children are viewed, spoken about and moulded in the interests of various kinds of power is a subtle but important aspect of the way relationships between children and their parents are presented in *The President's Child*.

Dr Gregory's view of Jason's "problems" (which, of course, later turn out to have all been fabricated by Homer so as to get Isabel herself into the "care" of Dr Gregory) is carefully constructed so as to appear rational and sensible, to adapt psychoanalysis easily to "commonsense" opinion. After telling Isabel that "[f]eminism is a perfectly legitimate standpoint from which a woman can view the world," he continues by asking her how she can expect "a male child to stand side by side with his mother and view the world as she does? His own selfish nature and

⁴ Commenting on *The President's Child* as allegory, Weldon has also stated that the novel "is, I suppose, about American involvement in Europe" (1985a, 307-8). She does not elaborate on this, and it is not a major part of this thesis' focus on the novel. It does have a slight bearing on the issue of the collapse of the public/private divide in the novel, which I will continue discussing below.

his love for you are at war" (*PC*, 62). Towards the end of the novel, Isabel sees that, to Dr Gregory and to Homer, she constitutes

a source of danger, moral and physical, to her son. Perhaps all fathers felt like this, in their hearts? That the mother damaged the male child, sapped his strength, warped his sexuality? (*PC*, 208)

While she does obey Homer and Dr Gregory's instructions regarding her planned death, Isabel nevertheless does not admit that their view of the world is the correct one. She is not certain that Jason will be better off being raised in America by Homer's parents, where, Homer says,

[h]e'll get a decent haircut, a proper education; early nights. He'll be safe, he'll have standards, he'll grow up into a good man. He needs discipline, Isabel. Boys do (*PC*, 206).

It is very clear by this point that what people take to be "in the best interests of the child", and what they see as the correct role and position of mothers *vis-à-vis* their differently gendered children, are always reflections of particular, political positions.

Weldon's assertion -- quoted in the second epigraph to this chapter -- that women change because they have children, and men do not change because they are never mothers to children, is thus also a reflection of a particular political standpoint. But what is this standpoint, exactly? In *The President's Child*, Isabel tells Dr Gregory that she had a baby "in an attempt to weigh myself down, to stop myself drifting, to give myself a sense of purpose, a point of obligation" (*PC*, 127). By her own account, Jason is her attempt to heal herself and to come to terms with what Dandy, the man she says loved her and thus shared with her "the grandeur of the divine... all worldly and temporal power" (*PC*, 93), meant to her. Isabel seems, in fact, to use the experience of having Jason deliberately in order to alter herself, to -- in her own words -- "fill myself up from the inside out" (*PC*, 127). She emphasises

the value of caring for her baby in this regard: "the sheer boring, repetitive purposeful nature of the task is a great purifying agent," and the necessity of buying a house and paying rates also constitutes, she says, "an acknowledgement of the community around and one's duty to it" (*PC*, 130-1). The alteration in Isabel, from the twenty two-year old who "was very tough and hard and thought [she] knew how to look after [her]self" (*PC*, 74), to someone who is forced to acknowledge that "[t]he weight of power was too much for her to bear" (*PC*, 211) is primarily accomplished as a result of having Jason. Homer, on the other hand, has not changed at all as a result of his experiences with Jason: his view of the world and of his own position within it remains the same. His desire to gain -- and serve the interests of -- "[r]eal power, real influence" (*PC*, 210) is the reason for his dedication to Jason, the President's child, and for his initial protection of, then attempted murder of, the child's mother.

Jason is, of course, not simply the President's child, but the President's son. His gender is also presented as important in the novel, and not simply for the reasons which I explored above. Apart from the male characters' views of Isabel's negative influence on Jason because she is not bringing him up to be a "real man", and the greater political value attached to male successors, there is also Isabel's own view of the importance of her child's gender. Finuala Dowling reads Isabel's "readiness to sacrifice herself for a male child rather than a female one" as a sign that "[d]espite her status as a career woman,... she attaches greater value to the one who inherits the name of the father" (1995, 119). She quotes from Isabel's thoughts as she descends to the street and to her death, when she thinks that

[i]f he was a girl... I would not do this. I would be more practical, less

reverent. I would see a daughter as an offshoot of me. I would be less prepared to sacrifice myself (*PC*, 213).

There is, however, another possible reading of these statements. Isabel does not so much attach greater value to Jason because he is male as recognise that the value attached to him by the patrilineal male world of power, which she has spent her life unsuccessfully fighting in a variety of ways, means that she cannot hope to keep him to herself. It is not so much that she places value on her male child that is evident in this passage, but the idea that she would place even greater value on a female one. It is the ideal of a female genealogy, written about at length by Luce Irigaray in the essays which make up her book *Sexes and genealogies* (1993c), which is hinted at here.

There are two other areas of *The President's Child* which explore the notion of the *difference* involved in mother-daughter relations. One is the relationship between Isabel and her own mother, and the other is contained in an anecdote told by Isabel as she prepares to sacrifice her life for Jason. She remembers, just after thinking about her own relationship with Jason (and the view of fathers regarding their sons and the sons' mothers), that

[s]he'd known a woman who'd committed suicide and killed her five-year-old daughter at the same time. How wicked some said: those were the more sophisticated. How brave, others said, less sophisticated. The child is the mother's property: if she goes, she must take the child with her (*PC*, 208).

This passage contains a yearning, on one level, for a more "primitive" or "older" view of the relationship between mother and child: the notion that the mother has produced the child and it is thus her responsibility, and also her property. The idea that this gives the mother at least some power, some way of resisting the authority and power of the masculine, is clearly attractive to Isabel, in spite of the fact that

she would doubtless fight against and criticise most aspects of a "less sophisticated" world view than her white, middle-class western one. But this passage also contains another element, that of the gender of the child. The child "taken" by her mother in the anecdote is a girl. This is significant, I think, because it gestures toward the idea that the relationship between mothers and daughters is different from that which exists between Isabel and her son. What this difference is remains unclear, and I am not attempting to argue that the relationship between mothers and daughters is one which contains the repressed (and whole) solution to all the problems posed for female subjects by patrilineal authority. Nevertheless, this moment -- in tandem with Isabel's moment of doubt/thought on the stairs -- does emphasise that this difference exists, and that what might be needed are

sentences that translate the bond between our body, her body, the body of our daughter... a language that is not a substitute for the *corps-à-corps* as the paternal language seeks to be, but which accompanies that bodily experience, clothing it in words that do not erase the body but speak the body (Irigaray, 1993c, 18-19).⁵

Isabel's relationship with her own mother is spoken of only at the beginning and the end of *The President's Child*. While the novel's "centre", then, is taken up with the action of the contest for control of Jason, the President's child, its outside edges belong to Isabel's mother, Harriet. This placing of the mother at the edges of the text is further emphasised by her geographical location in it: she lives, alone, on

⁵ The term "*corps-à-corps*", used by Irigaray, is retained untranslated in the text of *Sexes and genealogies*. It usually denotes, according to the translator, "armed combat between two warriors -- hand-to-hand fighting" (translator's note to Irigaray, 1993c, 9). Irigaray, however, is using it in an ambiguous manner: both to denote the hostility which the child (in psychoanalytic theory) feels towards the body of the mother, and to suggest that there may be other ways of relating the two bodies (of mother and child, but particularly mother and daughter) than that which exists at present.

a farm in the Australian outback. She is not a conventional grandmother to Jason. She never sends him a birthday present (*PC*, 21), doesn't remember the date of his birthday, and even takes a moment to recognise who Isabel is talking about on the telephone ("Jason? Oh, the little boy. He must be -- what? Four, five?" (*PC*, 23). In fact, Jason has just turned six.) Typically for a Weldon heroine, Isabel finds her mother difficult and apparently emotionally opaque towards her. She wishes that her mother would say conventional things to her, the things Isabel acknowledges that she "wanted her to say... [t]he things your [Homer's] mother says to you" (*PC*, 24). Isabel also tells Homer that "I don't think my mother is a woman at all.... Not now. Once she was, but now she's turned herself into the trunk of an old gum tree, and the sand has silted her up" (*PC*, 21). Harriet is thus both an unnatural woman (not "a woman at all"), and a woman who has made herself into the natural ("the trunk of an old gum tree"). Intriguingly, Isabel wonders -- and the reader cannot be certain of whether she says this to Homer -- "had Jason been a girl, whether Harriet would have taken more interest in her grandchild" (*PC*, 27). As I have shown, this is a question to which she returns (on her own behalf, this time) during the novel's dénouement, and which she then seems to answer in the affirmative. Isabel is herself "unsure of her welcome" (*PC*, 27) at her mother's home at the start of *The President's Child*, and her relationship with her mother as a child included being twice kicked in the face by one of her mother's beloved horses, then watching as her mother "wept when he [the horse] died, swollen horribly" (*PC*, 14). When Isabel was fifteen, her mother told her to leave, saying that "[i]t's no life for you here" (*PC*, 12), and though "[t]hey were all each other had" (*PC*, 13), refuses to go with Isabel when her daughter asks her to. Their relationship is clearly problematic, with

Isabel unable to understand her mother. Harriet seems more interested in her horses and the dusty yellow landscape than she is in Isabel, and she refuses to tell Isabel anything about her father, who abandoned them both when Isabel was a small child.

Dr Gregory and Homer make much of the influence of this abandonment on Isabel's psyche, emphasising that this is what has made her hate all men and become a feminist in order to wreak some kind of revenge. However, both ignore completely the influence of her mother on Isabel, an influence which even extends to her child's facial features: when kicked for the second time by the horse, which leaves the lower half of her face slightly imperfect, Isabel is told that "[i]t's unlucky to be beautiful.... If you are some man just comes along and marries you and stops you from making your own way in the world" (*PC*, 15). The critique of psychoanalysis in *The President's Child* is centrally constituted via the portrayal of Dr Gregory and his very conservative theoretical views.⁶

The neglect by this "conservative" psychoanalysis of the relationship between mother and daughter is one of the less obvious, but nonetheless important, objects of this critique. It is also, of course, an aspect of psychoanalytic theory which has been particularly problematised by feminist assessments of such theory, with aspects of Irigaray's psychoanalytic work standing as the most obvious example of

⁶ Both commentary on the uses of psychoanalysis, and the use of the psychoanalytic paradigm as a narrative vehicle, are common in Weldon's fiction. The latter is to be found in many of Weldon's short stories, in all three of the published collections: *Watching Me, Watching You* (1981), *Polaris and other stories* (1985), and *Moon over Minneapolis* (1991), while criticism of various kinds of psychotherapy can be found in the novels *The President's Child*, *Growing Rich* (1992) and *Affliction* (1993).

this. In *The President's Child*, the neglect of Isabel's mother by both Dr Gregory and by Homer remains in force even when both they and Isabel notice that "[h]er Australian accent was back" (PC, 205). It is directly after this that Dr Gregory gives his professional verdict on Isabel to Homer, saying that "[s]he will never fully come to terms with her anger with her father" (PC, 205). But Isabel's father, though Australian by birth, was not really part of her Australian life, or, arguably, "the origins of her being" (PC, 205), which she recognises as being signified by her old accent. Rather, it is her mother's voice which she is echoing or repeating, the one which, just prior to this moment of recognition, she consciously mimics when she proclaims that "[w]orse things happen at sea" (PC, 203). This phrase, she remembers, is one which "her mother used a lot when she was young" (PC, 203). However, neither Dr Gregory nor Homer notices the emergence, in this moment of fear and anguish, of words and an aspect of language which are associated not with Isabel's father, but with Harriet.

At the very end of the novel, Harriet is the one to whom Isabel takes Jason. Harriet sends him "a small koala bear, in real fur," and accompanying it is a note suggesting that Isabel take Jason to visit her in Australia, where she has sold the house in which Isabel grew up and is "living in Sydney now, with a view over the harbour" (PC, 216). The defeat of patrilineal power thus opens the way for the potential of a female genealogy, and of its potential corollary (in Maia's terms, at least): the possibility that Jason will now "belong to a new generation of man, who can find power enough inside themselves, and not go seeking for it in the exploitation and pillaging of women and the world" (PC, 218).

It is crucial, I think, that this new potential rests on a defeat of male power,

albeit a coincidental and accidental one. Another of Weldon's assertions about the novel sums up this point well: it is concerned, she says, with demonstrating "the impossibility of pretending that there isn't a conflict between male and female power" (1985a, 307-8). The novel's depictions of the apparently "liberated" masculine subjects of Homer and Elphick, Isabel's producer, is particularly important in this regard. This idea would seem to be the central point of both the "domestic" and the "thriller" skeins of the narrative of *The President's Child*, and is also the point which links these narratives. It might, in fact, be said to collapse or blend *all three* narrative skeins -- including the "literary" one as well -- into one another, since what occasions the link is the parallel disappearance of any kind of rigid divide between the public and private realms in the novel. There is no way clearly to separate issues of domestic power and its abuse from those of state or public power. While one might contend that this is primarily the result of the unusual position of Isabel and Jason due to the identity of Jason's father, the "literary" skein of the novel (via which the other narratives are presented) works against this simple reading.

Maia, narrator and subject of the "literary" narrative, asserts the dissolution of the distinction between public and private realms at the very beginning of the novel. Before telling Isabel's story to a group of her neighbours, she describes the safe suburban neighbourhood in which they all live, saying that it is "[e]asy to feel, on such a day [a peaceful Sunday] and in such a place, that great events are nothing to do with us... that people and politics are entirely separate" (PC, 5). But immediately she goes on to refute the view "that the mainstream of life is... a long way off," telling her audience -- and the reader -- that "[t]he river flows at the end of the garden;

what's more, it's deep, wide, muddy and tricky: not the tranquil flowing stream you might hope for" (PC, 5). The well-worn metaphor of the "river of life" is thus brought into play so as to assert the connection between the river at the end of the suburban gardens and that which flows in the places where state and public power are held. More natural, and particularly aural -- since Maia is blind -- symbols are introduced throughout the course of Maia's "literary" strand of the text. The sound of the rain against the window, for example ("*[p]lit-pat, spitter spat*" [PC, 5, 7, 8, 9, 12, 16, 18 and 150, 152; italics in original]) is used as a recurring refrain, which draws attention to the place in which Maia sits and tells her story, even though the story itself ranges in location across the world. The effect is to draw all that is outside, of other continents, and above all public, to just outside and indeed directly "*against the window*" (PC, 17, my emphasis) of the suburban house in which the story of Isabel and Jason is told. The bees which live in the large hedge which runs down the back of the communal garden (PC, 44, 47, 48, 49), and the sound of the tennis balls and rackets on the court at Wincaster Row (PC, 68, 70); the sound of weeping from the various houses there (PC, 165-67), and even the imagined sound of primitive danger -- the noise of animal feet (PC, 176-8) -- function as similar links between what is taken to be "outside" and public, and that which is seen as "inside" and private.⁷ The structuring of Maia's narrative, and particularly its use of the stylistic device of the aural refrain, thus renders the distinction between these two realms problematic, if not impossible.

⁷ I will comment further on Maia's narrative's use of sounds, and her comments on "cris de joie" (PC, 81-2), when dealing with her function in the text later in this chapter.

The battle between Isabel and Homer/Joe and Pete/Dandy for the control of the President's son, Jason, is therefore not just an allegorical rendition of the battle between "male and female power". The novel also collapses the distinction between public and private space. The space of state power and authority -- the place where battles for the control of national and international power, of the "outside" where *The President's Child* has its origin (the chaos of the "East" as signified by the tale of the mistress of the president of the Phillippines) -- becomes contiguous with the domesticated and suburban "Western" world of Wincaster Row. The reader is thus compelled to notice the interconnectedness of these apparently separate realms. Contextually, the increasingly heated battle between men and women for the control of children, particularly after divorces, is also obliquely commented upon here. The rise in the western world of the 1980s, of "men's movement" politics is an aspect of this, and is arguably part of a more generalised "backlash" (see Faludi, 1992, 337-46) against feminism. Books with titles like *Why Men Are the Way They Are* (1986) and the bestselling *Iron John: A Book About Men* (1991) by men's movement leader Robert Bly, are published, while Bly makes public statements such as

[t]here's too much passivity and naïveté in American men today.... There's a disease going round, and women have been spreading it. Starting in the sixties, the women have really invaded men's areas and treated them like boys" (quoted in Faludi, 1992, 345).

This sounds quite remarkably similar to the comments made by Homer during the climactic moments of *The President's Child*. As Irigaray has also recently noted, the one sector of the law which "is currently mutating is the relationship between the male and female sexes, particularly insofar as the family and its relation to reproduction are concerned" (1993c, 1). As I have shown, therefore, *The*

President's Child presents its reader with a graphic battle between male and female power, based on the desire to control a child. It also demonstrates how these attempts to gain control of the child frequently rest on the claim to know what is "in the best interests of the child". The rearing of (all) children, this novel shows, is far from being a private and apolitical action.

However, the narrator(s) of the novel do not simply present this idea: they definitely take sides in the battle they describe. Male reviewers and readers of Weldon are noted for their extremely negative reactions to the way men are portrayed in her novels. Asked about this perception, Weldon says that "men are accustomed to seeing themselves in fiction as noble heroes carrying the action along, and in my novels they rarely do. So it appears to men that they are somehow discriminated against" (1985a, 313). The "new man" of the 1970s and 1980s -- like Homer -- is likely to dislike continued negative comment by feminist writers and critics regarding masculine power and authority,⁸ and *The President's Child* can in many ways be said to react against this. The novel makes its allegiance clear: it is criticising a culture in which, as Weldon has more recently put it, "[m]others always get blamed, even more in real life than in fiction. Mothers get blamed, I notice, for generic male behaviour" (1994c, 198). The idea that "[b]irth isn't what it was.

⁸ Susan Faludi catalogues a growing fear of female power -- even when such power is very small -- in various settings: "'The woman are taking over' is again a refrain many working women hear from their male colleagues -- after one or two women are promoted at their company, but while top management is still solidly male. In newsrooms, white male reporters routinely complain that only women and minorities can get jobs -- often at publications where women's and minorities' numbers are actually shrinking.... At Boston University, president John Silber fumed that his English department had turned into a 'damn matriarchy' -- when only six of its twenty faculty members were women" (1992, 86).

Mothers provide wombs, it's true, wherein a fetus of much-disputed legal ownership can grow: but the feeling still is, well, anyone can do it" (1994c, 199), is also increasingly prevalent, apparently coexisting with the former notion quite well. This is the public/private battle in which Isabel is engaged in the novel, a fight against male power which sees itself as under threat, but which is still so powerful that it is only the "lucky break" or accident of Dandy's sudden and unexpected death which enables Isabel to emerge as the victor. Her status as television personality and thus "public figure" does give her some power *vis-à-vis* the male forces against which she is ranged, but this power is swiftly dealt with: as Dowling notes, it is (ironically) Isabel's "compulsion to tell the truth" -- to Dr Gregory, to Homer, to Elphick and finally to the public/world on her television show -- "which tightens the trap about her" (1995, 120).⁹ *The President's Child* explores the growing divide between male and female subjects, a divide made more obvious by what Irigaray describes as the way

[t]he achievements recorded by recent movements for women's liberation have failed to establish a new *ethics* of sexuality... [while] serv[ing] notice to us that ethics is the crucial issue because they have released so much violent, undirected energy, desperate for an outlet (1993c, 3).

In other words, the recent social advancement of western women has produced widespread consternation and conflict, particular manifestations of which may be found in *The President's Child*. The sense of unease, rather than triumph, which accompanies Isabel's "happy ending" is caused by the manner in which the novel as a whole (including its ending) suggests both that "violent" energy is released by

⁹ Rather than her career being spoken of as a source of power, its existence denotes the fact that Isabel "can't be relied upon to live anonymously" (PC, 209).

Isabel's attempt to "tell the truth", and that this energy is likely to be (re)directed back against Isabel herself.¹⁰

As I have shown, the collapse of the boundary between the public and private realms in *The President's Child* is, in part, a result of the tripartite narrative structure of the novel. The three "skeins" of narrative, the "domestic", "thriller" and "literary" strands, produce between them this dissolution of the distinction. Of these strands, the one least discussed up to this point is that of the "literary", the aspect of the novel which might be said to be comprised of Maia's narrative. While it is useful to note the existence of the three "skeins" of *The President's Child*, it may also as a result be too easy to consider all aspects of the novel in terms of tripartite structuring. With regard to the narrative voices of the novel, one might contend that, apart from Isabel's first-person narrative -- as told to Dr Gregory -- there are also the chapters narrated by Maia, which in turn "alternate with those of a more privileged third-person narrator who operates in tandem with Maia" (Dowling, 1995, 119). This more "privileged" narrator is the "voice" which describes in detail the actions of Joe, Pete and Harry McSwain, and other events of which Isabel and Maia would presumably not be aware. Pete's visit to Dr Alcott, for example, during which he discovers which drugs ("Halperidol... in conjunction with Lithium" [PC, 174]) should be given to Dandy to curb his potentially problematic sexual appetite, is not

¹⁰ *The President's Child* might thus be said to examine the consequences of the difference between the sexes, which could be expressed like this: "[w]hereas man must live out the pain and experience the impossibility of being cut off from and in space (being born, leaving the mother), woman lives out the painful or impossible experience of being cut off from or in time. (Is this their empirico-transcendental chiasmus?)" (Irigaray, 1993a, 64) The novel's highly coincidental or contrived ending suggests this and similar questions, to which there are no easy answers.

something which Isabel or Maia could realistically have known about. The murder of Vera, and the conversation between Joe, Pete and Elphick, during which the latter agrees to accept “[f]ifteen thousand pounds” (*PC*, 191) to keep Isabel from telling the world about Jason’s parentage on her television show, are other examples of incidents which the other two narrators could not have known about. However, it may not be particularly useful to think of *The President’s Child* as having three narrators. Who is the other narrator, and what is the purpose of her presence? Is she simply another of Weldon’s intrusive, omniscient and “know-all” third-person narrators? I do not think that this is the case. In spite of the examples given above of incidents which cannot “realistically” be known by either Isabel or Maia, then, I would contend that asserting that this unnamed third narrator exists does not add any useful insights to an analysis of the workings of narrative voice(s) in the novel.

The President’s Child is a story, centrally the story of Isabel Rust, told by Maia. It is her voice which begins the novel -- “I gather past and present together and tell... stories” (*PC*, 5) -- and hers which ends it, saying “God laughs at me, buffeting me around his universe” (*PC*, 220). It is also, and simultaneously, Maia’s own story, which emerges in sections of self-reflexive insights and attempts at philosophical commentary. While Isabel’s voice is “heard” in the first person in the sections of the novel which are told to Dr Gregory, her voice is still mediated by and through Maia’s.¹¹ Close to the very end of the novel, Isabel tells Maia that she is

¹¹ And indeed, Maia tells the reader when she does so, noting, for example, that “Isabel told me she’d been seeing Dr Gregory, one Tuesday morning as I was taking clothes out of the washing machine and putting them in the dryer that stood next to it” (*PC*, 115).

going to Australia, then adds, “[b]ut there’s a story I want to tell you, first, so you can hand it on” (PC, 217). This, by implication, is the story which the reader is about to finish “hearing” from Maia, and is also the narrative with which I have been dealing up to this point in this chapter. I will now spend some time examining Maia’s *own story*, as it emerges within *The President’s Child* as a particular and important part of the novel. Maia’s own experiences are central to the novel. For one thing, she tells the reader: “I am blind” (PC, 5) in her second sentence, before even mentioning Isabel’s name for the first time.

While Maia does at one point remember the pleasures of sight at their most simple (“I would sometimes sit and stare for sheer pleasure at the clothes circulating on the other side of the window of the washing machine. Look, there it goes!” [PC, 115]), she is on the whole quite content with her blindness. She makes several of the benefits of her blindness clear to the reader. There are sexual benefits, since she is now the single focus of her husband Laurence’s sexual attention, and he is no longer unfaithful to her. Rather, he now “holds me in his arms, careful and caring and good at last” (PC, 47). Also, being blind has taught Maia self-restraint. She no longer joins the throng (of women) which spends its time “weeping [its] eyes out up and down Wincaster Row, asking advice, proclaiming resentments, red-eyed and self-pitying” (PC, 165). Rather, she has “gained in dignity” (PC, 165): it is others who tell her their problems, not she who tells her own to them. More than this, Maia has also learned to control her fear of the world and the unknown, to rationalise and understand it. She says:

I too suffer from fear; I wake in the night with a start, sure there’s someone, something in the room. And I can’t even turn on the light. So I invite the fear in, I speak to it: I say, tell me why you are so much greater than any individual

fate could merit -- and it replies, because I am all your fears; you are all one, you are not as many as you think you are: you must learn to share me. Loss suffered by any woman is every woman's loss. The voice of fear echoes in the dark, and I embrace it, and it melts into me, and is part of me, and is gone, and I fall back to sleep again, from black to darker black (*PC*, 178).

Maia's blindness, in other words, has given her understanding. It has also, according to this passage, shown her that the way to conquer fear is to acknowledge the connections between people, and particularly the connections between women. This insight in part explains Maia's willingness to tell stories to her neighbours, it is the reason Isabel tells Maia her story (for re-telling) before leaving to return to her mother-land, and it also reinforces the novel's point that the spheres of the public and the private -- as well as the people who inhabit them -- are very much connected with each other.

However, many of the "benefits" which Maia seems to derive from her blindness are not so much actual benefits as results of her attempt to escape from the constraints and horrors of her sighted life. Thus, Isabel's voice -- "reported" by Maia herself, of course -- tells the reader that "Maia lived in the light of her own mind, *since that was all she had*" (*PC*, 182, my emphasis). The "benefits" of being blind are all too often more easily understood as a desperate escape from the "reasons" for that blindness. Thus, it is the "sights you are spared," according to Maia, which are the real reason to "[c]ome in. Sear your eyes with a poker -- join me!" (*PC*, 192). The understanding which she describes, and the "mercy of your fellow men... [and] courtesy of social workers" are merely secondary and incidental results of not having to "witness the destruction of hope" (*PC*, 192). At this point in *The President's Child*, Maia exclaims "[o]f course I cannot see. I do not want to see. Do you?" (*PC*, 193).

There are other “reasons” for her blindness too, which is caused by an accident in which Maia is hit by a car after running into the road without looking, “because I had had a quarrel with my husband Laurence, and I didn’t see the car coming because I was crying, or perhaps because I didn’t want to” (*PC*, 17).¹² While the precise reason for the quarrel is not given, it seems likely to have been the result of Laurence’s infidelity, which is also ended by her blindness: Maia says that she has “caught Laurence’s butterfly nature on the pin of my helplessness” (*PC*, 47). Her own infidelity is likewise eliminated, since

I find it more difficult to betray him now that I can no longer look him in the eye. Fidelity seems desirable now that it is no longer owed to a seen object, a human being; but exists apart, in the head (*PC*, 151).

Now that Maia is blind, “Laurence clasps me and I clasp him, and that is all either of us needs” (*PC*, 152).¹³ Finally – and this is perhaps related to the need to conquer her own infidelity – there is Maia’s fear of her femininity. This fear is at least in part a result of her experience of pregnancy and childbirth, in which her baby is born “neither male nor female. It was born without reproductive organs: it died within minutes of birth, and just as well” (*PC*, 46). Maia is horrified by the experience, challenging the reader to “[c]ling to a sense of self through that, if you can” (*PC*, 46),

¹² This, together with the statements that “my eyes simply fail to register what they see” (*PC*, 16) and “[o]ccasionally some irritable physician will remark, ‘I am sure you could see if you wanted to’” (*PC*, 17), is the first suggestion that Maia’s blindness is an hysterical one. This is a point with which Weldon herself concurs, and I will be returning to it shortly.

¹³ Although Maia does not speak of this interdependence in quite such glowing terms elsewhere: emphasising that she herself is “[f]orever in the dark,” she adds that “Laurence has caught something of my languor: I pull him down into the velvet omnipresent dark. I would rather have my sight” (*PC*, 71). This is one of the very few moments in which Maia seems to desire the return of her sight.

and is unable to tell Laurence the full details. She just tells him that the baby was stillborn, having decided both that “[w]e cancelled each other out” and that she should bear “the burden of this knowledge alone” (PC, 46). Asked about her reaction to the experience by Isabel, Maia concedes that “[p]erhaps after all it was red rage burned out my eyes”: certainly, she admits with relief immediately after this that “[y]ou really cannot expect a blind woman to have a baby. Some do, of course, but it isn’t expected. Soon I will be too old, in any case, *and saved*” (PC, 47, my emphasis).

The reasons for Maia’s blindness are thus varied, and they certainly move the reader towards the view that her blindness is, in Weldon’s words, “an hysterical blindness” (1985a, 309). Her horror of the world – and particularly, of having to look at that world and thus participate in it as a “normal” woman – leads to Maia’s desire not to see anything, which she eventually acknowledges when she invites the reader to join her in blindness (PC, 192-3). Weldon remarks further that Maia is “cured when she comes to acknowledge it” (1985a, 309). However, neither Weldon herself, nor the novel (in my reading of it) belittle this blindness by suggesting that it is hysterical in origin. Before examining possible explanations for Maia’s “cure” – her regaining of her sight – at the end of *The President’s Child*, however, it is necessary to examine the function of her blindness as literary trope in the novel.

An important element of all the narrative skeins of the novel is the concept of truth. The status of the truth in the realm of the “domestic” is shown to be problematic by Homer and Isabel’s relationship (amongst others: Maia and Laurence are another example), while Isabel’s attempts to tell the truth in terms of the “thriller” narrative are both doomed and problematised. Elphick’s comment that

"[t]elelevision is a strange place in which to seek truth, still less declaim it" (PC, 140), serves as an apt summary of the latter point. On the level of Maia's "literary" skein of narrative, then, what is the status of "truth"? When asked by her listeners about whether or not Isabel's is a "true story", Maia first replies that the story is, as she tells it, "[m]ore or less true" (PC, 6), then later simply asserts that "[y]es" (PC, 167), it is true. If one takes note of the manner in which the narrative is organised, however, it becomes clear -- as was suggested by my earlier comments on Maia as the novel's framing narrator -- that her story can in no way be viewed as an exact representation of the events, statements and actions which it contains. Given that Maia is re-telling a story related to her by Isabel (in spite of the apparent first person status of Isabel's "confessions" to Dr Gregory), and that neither she nor Isabel could realistically be aware of the events and workings of several parts of the novel (including the exact reason for Dandy Ivel's death), most of the narrative is concretely prevented from having the status of "truth". The fact that Maia, as narrator of this story, is blind is also important to this, because of the truth-value attached to the sense of sight. Something can be proved, can be true, can be scientifically and accurately the case if it can be seen, and since Maia cannot see, her ability to function as purveyor of a true story is immediately doubtful. The status of her story -- and thus of *The President's Child* itself -- is thus not that of the "truth".¹⁴

Maia is, however, aware of the problematic nature of the "truth" anyway.

¹⁴ Hattie Upton, the narrator of *Growing Rich*, is of course also disabled, although she is paralysed rather than blind. Her resemblance to Maia in terms of the truth-value which can be attached to their narratives, should, however, be noted.

Close to the beginning of the novel, having been asked by her audience whether or not the story she is about to tell is true, Maia comments to the reader that the members of her audience

expect truth to be exact and finite. I know that it is more like a mountain that has to be scaled. The peak of the mountain pierces the clouds and can only rarely be seen, and has never been reached. And what you see of it, moreover, depends upon the flank of the mountain you stand upon, and how exhausted getting even so far has made you (*PC*, 6).

She is here asserting the huge, but partial and contingent, status of "truth", simultaneously suggesting both its existence, and the impossibility of describing and defining it. It only deepens the reader's sense of the problem with which Maia is grappling here when one notices that the metaphor with which she describes "truth" is one which, ironically, makes use of -- or refers to -- the sense of sight which she does not have. It comes to seem appropriate, by the end of the novel, that it is Isabel who helps Maia with the problem of not being able to see (the "truth") both literally and figuratively. When Maia becomes physically blind, it is Isabel -- rather than Laurence -- who helps her with the new practical considerations of her life. The extent of these problems is graphically summarized for the reader by Maia's example of the extra hazard rain is to the blind. She says that "[a] stick will tell you where the kerb is, but very little about the depth of the puddle the other side" (*PC*, 9). This kind of hazard is an example of what constitutes, for Maia, "the new, frightening dark" through which Isabel very practically guides her "until I became accustomed to it" (*PC*, 10).

The extent of Isabel's help is, at this point, limited: Maia comments that she is helpful and comforting because of her "refusal, almost, to believe that going blind was a major event. She was blind to my blindness, in all but a practical sense" (*PC*,

10). By telling Maia her story, however, and thus enabling Maia to retell it to others, she is a source of help on a more figurative – although ultimately also literal – level. This is suggested on a symbolic level early in the novel, when Maia comments on the fact that now “that I can no longer see people I hold memories of their appearance in my mind” (*PC*, 11). She then describes what Isabel looks like, showing her first lying “upon a stone slab, hands folded in prayer, like some carved saint who achieved great glory in life and is remembered in death” (*PC*, 11). She then adds some physical detail, and states that

in my vision she sits up, and turns and smiles at me, and rises and stretches, confident and proud of her body, and saunters off, in so modern and careless a fashion as to put all thoughts of knights and graven images out of my mind (*PC*, 11).

This description, occurring close to the start of *The President's Child*, is quite startling in its difference from the wealth of busy, practical detail which makes up the plot at this stage. In it, Isabel is cast as modern goddess, as a woman who is sure of herself, her past, and her future. As Maia acknowledges, this is her own “vision”, and it is also a product of her blindness, arising out of her ability to “see” Isabel as she wishes to in her imagination. But this “vision” is ultimately triumphant at the end of Isabel’s story in the novel, and it is directly after the retelling of this story that Maia regains her sight. She does so because telling Isabel’s story enables her to acknowledge – and accept – that “the struggle is eternal, and dreadful. There will never be peace. There is no pure and perfect victory for Good” (*PC*, 219). Maia thus accepts, via the figure of Isabel and the symbolic vision or narrative which is created through her, that she will never be able to see the truth clearly, even if she denies herself her literal vision in order to try to do so.

This is definitely not to assert that Maia's period of blindness does not have its uses, both for her and for "her" narrative. Her "cure" seems likely to be as ambivalent an experience as her blindness, in spite of the initial euphoria ("I run up and down the stairs. I laugh. I cry. Colours seem strange and mad and ever-changing. Print dances up and down before me, redolent of meaning...." [PC, 220]) with which it is greeted. Maia's blindness, above all, brings her -- and the reader of *The President's Child* -- an understanding of the connections between aspects of the world, power, and women's experience of that world. It enables her, in her own words, to "feel equal to the responsibility of being whole and perfect" (PC, 152). This understanding is, I think, encoded in the metaphor of the "*cris de joie*" (PC, 81), or cries made during lovemaking. These are clearly heard by Maia while she is blind, and they come to represent these "connections", since "[t]hey are not good or bad: they are there all around" (PC, 82). As Maia notes, "[w]hen I had eyes, I never heard them" (PC, 82): as a result, she could not (without losing her sight) gain the semblance of hope which the interconnectedness of the world -- and particularly, its women -- later brings her. It is only by denying herself sight, therefore, that Maia is able to relinquish the idea that the "good" and "truth" can be attained. She can thus also accept a more contingent notion of identity for herself.

By the end of *The President's Child*, then, Maia has been able, via the novel's narrative structure and the interconnected stories it tells, to "speak from where [she is] and of the exploitation that is imposed on [her] without the least wish that women take power" (Irigaray, 1988, 154). Rather than a wish to "take power", Maia's desire seems to be for a different kind of system of power, in which, for example, Jason will be able to become a different kind of male subject. Likewise, the connections

between women might, in this scenario, be acknowledged and benefited from. *The President's Child* conveys a wish similar to Irigaray's when she continues her above comment as follows:

On the contrary, I wish that women could succeed in checking certain power, that they would arrive at deconstructing and reconstructing another mode of living in society (1988, 154).

Particularly important to this possibility are the neglected genealogical connections between women, as is suggested by my analysis of the novel's presentation of both Isabel and Harriet's relationship, and the ways in which the connections between them are ignored (by Homer and Dr Gregory) and carefully explored (by Maia). The desire for and the possibility of women being able to "check certain power" is thus Maia's experience in and of the text of *The President's Child*. This part of the narrative, the "literary" skein in Weldon's terminology, is therefore the one in which the vision of Isabel as victorious modern goddess is constructed. However, given the sense of unease which I described as accompanying Isabel's winning of the battle against patrilineal power, her story (which is comprised of Weldon's "domestic" and "thriller" narrative threads) might be said to convey the present impossibility of the "wish" that women "arrive at deconstructing and reconstructing another mode of living in society". The coincidental and overtly contrived "luck" of the moment of Dandy's death and Isabel's resultant liberation serves to curb and question the potentially promising view created by Maia's narrative, thus moving *The President's Child*, like so many of Weldon's novels, toward an ambivalent and contradictory close.

Conclusion

"I still believe in that miracle.... [I]f we seize the political and social energy, the desire for change, that now convulses the whole world, we could build ourselves a utopia, but that's another matter" (Weldon, 1994b, 197).

The chapters of this thesis have not so much come to conclusions as problematised or postponed them. Undecidability and ambivalence have thus become pervasive, with rigid closure prevented in the chapters by my arguments that the texts themselves are not subject to such closure. This might, however, be seen as a problem: as Barbara Johnson states, "[i]t is often said, in literary-theoretical circles, that to focus on undecidability is to be apolitical" (1987, 193-4). Why, then, would a thesis whose openly declared theoretical focus is the apparently obviously political one of feminism choose to focus on what is undecidable about the texts with which it deals?

This is partly a question about what is expected of reading and interpretation. If the reading process is itself viewed as apolitical, then the notion that "the generalized text of deconstruction... is... a universal formalism which makes nothing real, nothing matter" (Gallop, 1988, 89-90) appears. However if, as Jane Gallop argues, one accepts that reading itself is a politicised process (something which feminist critics of many persuasions have long asserted), the view that "everything is textual, mediated, interpretable" (1988, 89-90) means in turn that "everything must be *read* -- in the strong sense -- *and* that everything is also a practical question" (1988, 30-1, *emphases in original*). Gallop thus asserts that reading is a political process, but adds two qualifications to this: firstly, her emphasis of the word "read", and secondly, her insistence that this needs to be done "in the strong sense". It is,

therefore, a particular kind of reading that is political in the way Gallop wishes to claim.

I would argue that this kind of reading is the type which has been used during the course of this thesis. In it, the novels on which I have focused have not been expected to provide political solutions or complete new versions and definitions of female bodies, identity and sexuality. Rather, their re-presentations of existing conceptions of these aspects of female existence have been read so as to explore what is said and not said by them, what is implied, what cannot be said, and what may perhaps be said at some point in the future. This might be a utopian kind of reading method -- reading for an ideal which does not and perhaps can never exist - - but as Luce Irigaray emphasises, "[i]f to be utopian is to want a place that doesn't exist yet in some of its modalities, I am utopian" (1988, 164). This conception of a space which does not yet exist might also seem apolitical, but it is not. As Irigaray continues, it is not a place which is entirely in the imagination -- "I only speak of this place from the sensory and corporeal experience which I have of it" -- but is an as yet still hidden place which nonetheless "already exists and that I wish could be developed culturally, socially, amorously" (1988, 164). It is also a "real" political possibility in which Fay Weldon too, according to the epigraph above, wishes to believe.

What I have attempted to illustrate in my discussions of the four novels which are the chief foci of this thesis, then, is the manner in which a certain kind of reading process can suggest -- and perhaps deliberately not make wholly evident -- the (utopian) possibilities of which Irigaray speaks. Dealing with *Puffball*, I showed how the relationship between the female and the natural can neither be ignored nor

simply overturned or rejected if feminism is to find new and less oppressive ways of expressing (or reading) that relationship. The indeterminacies and problematic, oppressive notions of what it means to be pregnant and to give birth are also explored in the chapter on *Puffball*, and this discussion moves on into the chapter on *The Cloning of Joanna May* without finding clear solutions to the problem of non-signification of particularly female bodily experiences. As my reading of *The Cloning of Joanna May* shows, the (male) scientific attack on what has previously been viewed as a female preserve need not necessarily be read negatively. Rather, it can be seen to open up new, perhaps contradictory, but potentially useful insights into the relationships between women, and thus also contain the possibility of different definitions of self.

A reading process which focuses on undecidability was also used in the chapters on *Growing Rich* and *The President's Child*. In the former, the text's dealings with female subjects' attempts to make sense and use of their wayward female bodies formed the main focus of the chapter. Both this novel and *The President's Child* were also seen to explore the desires and authority of a controlling narrator. Via the use of this device, multiple narratives of female experience, full of ambivalence and a continual process of change and revision, are generated and explored.

This thesis has not attempted to posit a new theory of femininity, nor to discover such a theory in the novels with which it deals. It has instead focused on the politics of what is undecidable and as yet unrepresentable about female experience and identity. Referring to abortion, subject of perhaps *the* contemporary bodily controversy in western culture and politics, and which affects most powerfully

the bodies of women, Johnson asserts: "Everything I have read about the abortion controversy in its present form leads me to suspect that... the undecidable *is* the political. There is politics precisely because there is undecidability" (1987, 193-4). Reading the feminist attempts to re-present female identity in Weldon's novels from this perspective, as I have in this thesis attempted to do, results in their highly politicised -- and perhaps utopian -- impulses being made evident. It thus becomes clear that it is within the realm of the presently undecidable that possibilities for change and for the reintroduction into language and culture of "values of desire, pain, joy, the body. Living values. Not discourses of mastery, which are in a way dead discourses, a dead grid imposed upon the living" (Irigaray, 1991, 51) can be located.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ainley, Alison. 1990. "The Ethics of Sexual Difference." In Fletcher, J and Benjamin, A (eds). *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: the work of Julia Kristeva*. London: Routledge pp 53-62.
- Appignanesi, Lisa and Forrester, John. 1992. *Freud's Women*. London: Virago.
- Armstrong, Nancy. 1987. *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Barreca, Regina (ed). 1994a. *Fay Weldon's Wicked Fictions*. Hanover: University Press of New England.
- 1994b. "Introduction." *Fay Weldon's Wicked Fictions* ed Barreca, R. pp 1-8.
- 1994c. "It's the End of the World as We Know It: Bringing Down the House in Fay Weldon's Fiction." *Fay Weldon's Wicked Fictions* ed Barreca, R. pp 172-187.
- Barrett, Michèle and Phillips, Anne (eds). 1992. *Destabilizing theory: contemporary feminist debates*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Baruch, Elaine Hoffman. 1988. "A Womb of His Own." In Baruch, E.H., Adamo, Amadeo F. Jnr and Seager, J. (eds). *Embryos, Ethics and Women's Rights: Exploring the New Reproductive Technologies*. New York: Harrington Park Press. pp 135-9.
- Baruch, Elaine Hoffman and Serrano, Lucienne (eds). 1988. *Women Analyze Women: in France, England and the United States*. New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Bhabha, Homi. 1985. "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." *October*. Winter: 125-133.
- Bronfen, Elisabeth. 1994. "'Say Your Goodbyes and Go': Death and Women's Power in Fay Weldon's Fiction." In Barreca, R (ed). pp 69-82.
- Brookner, Anita. 1980. "The return of the earth mother." Review of Fay Weldon, *Puffball*, *The Times Literary Supplement* 4013, February 22, p 202.
- Brownjohn, Alan. 1989. "Mechanical Means." Review of Fay Weldon, *Wolf the Mechanical Dog*, *The Times Literary Supplement* January 6-12, p 22.

Brownstein, Rachel. 1994. "The Importance of Aunts." In Barreca, R (ed). pp 59-68.

Butler, Marilyn. 1988. "Feminist Criticism, Late-80s Style." *The Times Literary Supplement* March 11, pp 283-285.

Cixous, Hélène. 1981a. "The Laugh of the Medusa." In Marks, E and de Courtivron, I (eds). *New French Feminisms*. New York: Schocken Books. pp 245-64.

— 1981b. "Sorties." In Marks, E and de Courtivron, I (eds). pp 90-98.

Cornell, Drucilla. 1991. *Beyond Accomodation: Ethical feminism, Deconstruction and the Law*. New York and London: Routledge.

Coward, Rosalind. 1985. "Are Women's Novels Feminist Novels?" In Showalter, E (ed). pp225-239.

— 1992. *Our treacherous hearts: why women let men get their way*. London: Faber.

Craig, Patricia. 1989. "All our dog days." Review of Fay Weldon, *The Cloning of Joanna May*, *The Times Literary Supplement* May 12-18, p 518.

De Beauvoir, Simone. 1972 [1949]. *The Second Sex*. trans. Parshley, H.M. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

De Lauretis, Theresa. 1984. "Semiotics and Experience." *Alice doesn't: feminism, semiotics, cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. pp 158-186; 211-215.

— 1987. *Technologies of Gender: essays on theory, film and fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

— 1990. "Upping the Anti (sic) in Feminist Theory." In Hirsch, M and Fox Keller, E (eds). Ch 15, pp 255-270.

Diamond, Irene and Quinby, Lee (eds). 1988. *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Doody, Margaret Anne. 1994. "Classic Weldon." In Barreca, R (ed). pp 37-58.

Dowling, Finuala Rachel. 1995. "Subversive Narrative and Thematic Strategies: A Critical Appraisal of Fay Weldon's Fiction." unpublished thesis, D.Litt et Phil, UNISA.

- Drabble, Margaret. 1965. *The Millstone*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Duncker, Patricia. 1992. *Sisters and Strangers: An Introduction to Contemporary Feminist Fiction*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Elam, Diane. 1994. *Feminism and Deconstruction. Ms. en Abyrne*. London: Routledge.
- Faludi, Susan. 1992. *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Felman, Shoshana. 1993. *What Does a Woman Want? Reading and Sexual Difference*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Firestone, Shulamith. 1971 [1970]. *The Dialectic of Sex: the case for feminist revolution*. New York: Bantam.
- Foucault, Michel. 1979 [1976]. *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1 An Introduction*. trans. Huxley, R. London: Allen Lane/Penguin.
- Freccero, Carla. 1990. "Notes of a Post-Sex Wars Theorizer." In Hirsch, M and Fox Keller, E (eds). Ch 18, pp 305-325.
- Friedman, Susan Stanford. 1988. "Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor: Gender Difference in Literary Discourse." *Feminist Studies* 13(1): 49-82.
- Fuss, Diana. 1989. *Essentially Speaking. Feminism, nature and difference*. New York: Routledge.
- Gallop, Jane. 1982. *Feminism and Psychoanalysis. The Daughter's Seduction*. Basingstoke: MacMillan.
- 1988. *Thinking Through the Body*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- 1992. *Around 1981. Academic Feminist Literary Theory*. New York: Routledge.
- Gallop, Jane; Hirsch, Marianne and Miller, Nancy K. 1990. "Criticizing Feminist Criticism." In Hirsch, M and Fox Keller, E (eds). Ch 20, pp 349-369.
- Gatens, Moira. 1992. "Power, Bodies and Difference." In Barrett, M and Phillips, A (eds). pp 120-137.
- Gieve, Katherine. 1989. *Balancing Acts: On Being a Mother*. London: Virago.
- Gillooly, Eileen. 1991. "Women and Humor (Review Essay)." *Feminist Studies* 17(3): 473-93.

- Glavin, John. 1994. "Fay Weldon: Leader of the Frivolous Band." In Barreca, R (ed). pp 133-151.
- Greene, Gayle and Kahn, Coppélia (eds). 1985. *Making A Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*. London: Methuen.
- 1993. *Changing Subjects: The Making of Feminist Literary Criticism*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. 1989. *Sexual Subversions: three French feminists*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- Hirsch, Marianne and Fox Keller, Evelyn (eds). 1990. *Conflicts in Feminism*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Humm, Maggie. 1991. *Border Traffic: Strategies of Contemporary Women Writers*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Irigaray, Luce. 1985a [1974]. *Speculum of the other woman*. trans. Gill, G.C. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- 1985b [1979]. *This Sex Which is Not One*. trans. Porter, C. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- 1988 [1980]. "Interview." In Baruch, E. H and Serrano, L (eds). pp 147-164.
- 1990 [1977]. "Women's Exile. Interview with Luce Irigaray." trans. Venn, C. In Cameron, D (ed). *The Feminist Critique of Language. A Reader*. London and New York: Routledge.
- 1991. *The Irigaray Reader*. ed, translated and introduced by Whitford, M. Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell.
- 1993a [1984]. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. trans. Burke, C and Gill, G.C. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- 1993b [1990]. *je, tu, nous. Toward a Culture of Difference*. trans. Martin, A. London: Routledge.
- 1993c [1987]. *Sexes and genealogies*. trans. Gill, G.C. New York: Columbia University Press.
- 1994 [1989]. *thinking the difference. For a Peaceful Revolution*. trans. Montin, K. New York: Routledge.
- Jacobus, Mary. 1986. *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism*. London: Methuen.

- Jacobus, Mary; Fox Keller, Evelyn and Shuttleworth, Sally (eds). 1990. *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science*. New York: Routledge.
- Jardine, Alice A. 1981. "Pre-Texts for the Transatlantic Feminist." *Yale French Studies* 62, pp 220-236.
- 1985. *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Jardine, Alice A and Smith, Paul (eds). 1987. *Men in Feminism*. New York: Methuen.
- Johnson, Barbara. 1987. "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion." *A World of Difference*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press pp 184-199.
- 1987. "My Monster/My Self." *A World of Difference*. pp 144-154.
- Kamuf, Peggy. 1990. "Replacing Feminist Criticism." in Hirsch, M and Fox Keller, E (eds). Ch 5, pp 105-111.
- Kaplan, Cora. 1986. *Sea Changes: Culture and Feminism*. London: Verso.
- 1990. "Feminist Literary Criticism: 'New Colours and Shadows'." In Coyle, M; Garside, P; Kelsall, M and Peck, J (eds). *Encyclopaedia of Literature and Criticism*. London: Routledge pp 750-763.
- 1994. "Fictions of Feminism: Figuring the Maternal." *Feminist Studies* 20(1): 153-167.
- Kaplan, E. Ann. 1992. *Motherhood and Representation: the mother in popular culture and melodrama*. London: Routledge.
- Kemp, Peter. 1992. "Penile servitude." Review of Fay Weldon, *Life Force*,. *The Times Literary Supplement* July 10. p 21.
- Kenyon, Olga. 1988. "Fay Weldon and the Radicalising of Language." *Women Novelists Today: A Survey of English Writing in the Seventies and Eighties*. Brighton: Harvester. Ch 4, pp 104-128.
- Kossick, Shirley G. 1989. "The Fiction of Fay Weldon: a Critical Survey." *UNISA English Studies*. 17(1): 28-34.
- Kristeva, Julia. 1985 [1977/1983]. "Stabat mater." In Suleiman, S.R (ed). pp 99-118

- Mackay, Shena. 1987. "Nurturing Nell." Review of Fay Weldon, *The Hearts and Lives of Men* and *The Rules of Life*, *The Times Literary Supplement* September 11-17, p 977.
- Martin, Emily. 1987. *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- McDonald, Christie. 1991. "Changing the facts of Life: The Case of Baby M." *Substance* 20(1) (#64) pp 31-48.
- Meese, Elizabeth A. 1986. *Crossing the Double-Cross: The Practice of Feminist Criticism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Mile, Siân. 1994. "Slam Dancing with Fay Weldon." In Barreca, R (ed). pp 21-36.
- Miller, Nancy K. 1990. "The Text's Heroine: A Feminist Critic and Her Fictions." in Hirsch, M and Fox Keller, E (eds). Ch 6, pp 112-120.
- Mitchell, Juliet. 1974. *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*. London: Penguin.
- Moi, Toril. 1985. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London and New York: Methuen.
- Morris, Meaghan. 1988a. *The Pirate's Fiancée: Feminism, reading, postmodernism*. London: Verso.
- 1988b. "The Pirate's Fiancée: Feminists and Philosophers, or maybe tonight it'll happen." In Diamond, I and Quinby, L (eds). pp 21-42.
- Mortimer, Penelope. 1964 [1962]. *The Pumpkin Eater*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- The New Our Bodies, Ourselves*. 1994. Boston: Boston Women's Health Collective pp 317-324.
- Palmer, Paulina. 1989. *Contemporary Women's Fiction: Narrative Practice and Feminist Theory*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Pines, Dinora. 1993. *A Woman's Unconscious Use of Her Body. A Psychoanalytical Perspective*. London: Virago.
- Quiello, Rose. 1994. "Going to Extremes: The Foreign Legion of Women in Fay Weldon's *The Cloning of Joanna May*." In Barreca, R (ed). pp 83-92.
- Rich, Adrienne. 1986 [1976]. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: Norton.

- Richardson, Diane. 1993. *Women, motherhood and childrearing*. Basingstoke and London: Macmillan.
- Robinson, Sally. 1991. *Engendering the Subject: Gender and Self-Representation in Contemporary Women's Fiction*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Roper, Christopher. 1993. "Science Fiction/Fiction Science: That Well-named Thing." In Bell, N and Cowper-Lewis, M (eds). *Literature, Nature and the Land: Ethics and Aesthetics of the Environment. Collected AUETSA Papers 1992*. Department of English: University of Zululand. pp 334-338.
- Rose, Jacqueline. 1986. *Sexuality in the field of vision*. London: Verso.
- 1991. *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*. London: Virago.
- Russ, Joanna. 1983. *How to Suppress Women's Writing*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Sage, Lorna. 1992. *Women in the House of Fiction: Post-War Women Novelists*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Salzmann-Brunner, Brigitte. 1988. *Amanuenses to the Present.. Protagonists in the Fiction of Penelope Mortimer, Margaret Drabble and Fay Weldon*. Berne: Peter Lang.
- Scott, Joan W.. 1990. "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism." In Hirsch, M and Fox Keller, E (eds). Ch 8, pp 134-148.
- Sellers, Susan. 1988. *Writing Differences. Readings from the seminar of Hélène Cixous*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Shelley, Mary. 1969 [1818]. *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Showalter, Elaine (ed). 1985. *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*. New York: Pantheon.
- Sigal, Clancy. 1987. "Dinner's at 8. When's the Revolution?" Review of Fay Weldon, *The Shrapnel Academy*, *New York Times Book Review* April 26. p 14.
- Smart, Carol. 1987. "'There is of course the distinction dictated by nature': law and the problem of paternity." In Stanworth, M (ed). pp 98-117.

- Spallone, Patricia. 1989. *Beyond Conception: The New Politics of Reproduction*. Basingstoke: MacMillan.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1987. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York: Methuen.
- Stanworth, Michelle. 1987. "Reproductive Technologies and the Deconstruction of Motherhood." In Stanworth, M (ed). pp 10-35, 191-4.
- Stanworth, Michelle (ed). 1987. *Reproductive Technologies. Gender, motherhood and medicine*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- 1990. "Birth Pangs: Conceptive Technologies and the Threat to Motherhood." in Hirsch, M and Fox Keller, E (eds). Ch 17, pp. 288-304.
- Suleiman, Susan Rubin. 1985. "Writing and Motherhood." In Garner, S. N; Kahane, C and Sprengnether, M (eds). *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- 1986. *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Wacjman, Judy. 1991. "Reproductive Technology: Delivered into Men's Hands." *Feminism confronts technology*. Cambridge: Polity Press. pp 54-80.
- Walker, J.K.L. 1987. "Sinners against women, nation and nature." Review of Fay Weldon, *The Heart of the Country*, *The Times Literary Supplement* February 13. p 164.
- Ward Jouve, Nicole. 1991. *White woman speaks with forked tongue: criticism as autobiography*. London: Routledge.
- Waugh, Patricia. 1989. *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern*. London: Routledge.
- Weldon, Fay. 1967. *The Fat Woman's Joke*. London: Coronet.
- 1976. *Remember Me*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- 1977. *Little Sisters*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- 1978. *Praxis*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- 1980. *Puffball*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- 1981. *Watching Me, Watching You*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

- 1982. *The President's Child*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- 1983. *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- 1984a. "How to be Feminist." *New Society* 68 (1123): 354.
- 1984b. *Letters to Alice on First Reading Jane Austen*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- 1985a. Interview. In Haffenden, John. *Novelists in Interview*. London: Methuen. pp 305-320.
- 1985b. *Polaris and Other Stories*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- 1985c. *Rebecca West*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- 1986. *The Shrapnel Academy*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- 1987a. *The Heart of the Country*. London: Vintage.
- 1987b. *The Hearts and Lives of Men*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- 1987c. *The Rules of Life*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- 1988a. *Leader of the Band*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- 1988b. "Towards a humorous view of the universe." *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 15 (1-3): 309-311.
- 1989. *The Cloning of Joanna May*. London: Collins.
- 1990. *Darcy's Utopia*. London: HarperCollins.
- 1991. *Moon Over Minneapolis or Why She Couldn't Stay*. London: HarperCollins.
- 1992a. *Growing Rich*. London: HarperCollins.
- 1992b. *Life Force*. London: HarperCollins.
- 1993a. *Affliction*. London: HarperCollins.
- 1993b. "House of Pain." *Allure*. Los Angeles, May, pp 148-51,174.
- 1994a. "Beauty and Pain." *Allure*. Los Angeles, January, pp 56-60.
- 1994b [1990]. "The Changing Face of Fiction." In Barreca, R (ed). pp 188-197.

- 1994c [1990]. "Of Birth and Fiction." In Barreca, R (ed). pp 198-208.
 - 1994d [1991]. "On the Reading of Frivolous Fiction." In Barreca, R (ed). pp 227-8.
 - 1994e [1992]. "Infidelity." In Barreca, R (ed). pp 219-226.
 - 1995a. "Everyone needs an ancestor." *The Daily Telegraph*, May 6, p A1.
 - 1995b. "Is Thin Better?" *FEMINA Fashion and Beauty File*. April, pp 66-7.
- Weldon, Estela V. 1988. *Mother Madonna Whore. The Idealization and Denigration of Motherhood*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Whitford, Margaret. 1991a. "Introduction." In Irigaray, L. *The Irigaray Reader* ed Whitford, M. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. pp 1-15 and pp 71-78.
- 1991b. *Luce Irigaray. Philosophy in the Feminine*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Wilde, Alan. 1988. "'Bold, but not too bold': Fay Weldon and the Limits of Poststructuralist Criticism." *Contemporary Literature* 29 (3): 403-419.
- Wittig, Monique. 1985. *Les Guerilleres*. trans. Le Vay, D. Boston: Beacon.
- Wolff, Janet. 1990. *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Woolf, Virginia. 1977 [1929]. *A Room of One's Own*. London: Granada.
- Zipper, Juliette and Sevenhuisen, Selma. 1987. "Surrogacy: Feminist Notions of Motherhood Reconsidered." In Stanworth, M (ed). pp 118-138.